

Tzachi Zamir

Ethics and the Beast:

A Speciesist Argument for Animal Liberation.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2007.

Pp. 158.

US\$38.50 (cloth ISBN-13: 978-0-691-13328-7).

According to its acknowledgements, this book is the result of a number of arguments that Zamir had with Justice Richard Posner in which he 'did not fare well' in defending his moral vegetarianism against Posner's elenchi. As a result, Zamir has staked out new territory in the animal ethics debate in which expediency with regard to animal liberation trumps the need to undermine speciesism.

Since the 1975 publication of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, all but a few philosophers writing in support of animal liberation have argued that the controverting of *speciesism* is a necessary conceptual first-step in achieving true animal liberation. By contrast, Zamir argues for what he calls 'speciesist liberationism', claiming that a rejection of speciesism is *not* necessary for the reform of our current attitudes and practices toward nonhuman animals, and that, contrary to conventional Singerian wisdom, speciesism and animal liberation are in fact quite *compatible*. Not only are they compatible, but, according to Zamir, there are a number of good arguments for why one *should* be both a speciesist *and* an animal liberationist, the central one being based on the '[w]eighty practical ramifications' that follow from the 'deradicalization' of the animal liberation movement and the embracing by animal liberationists of 'conservative, widely shared, moral beliefs' (xi).

At the heart of the book is Zamir's claim that solely from the fact that X has greater value than Y, it does not follow that X's interests always trump Y's interests. As Zamir points out, there is 'no simple semantic equivalence between greater value and trumping interests' (5). To illustrate, given a situation in which it is possible to rescue only one, I could admit that the life of an important scientist is *more valuable* than that of my aging father while simultaneously be justified in allowing the interests of my father to *take priority* over those of the scientist in choosing whom to rescue. According to Zamir, once animal liberationists see that *value* and *interests* can be conceptually de-coupled in this way (thus abandoning any sort of 'trumping thesis'), they can then *concede* that humans are more valuable than animals, *reject* the implication that human interests must always trump animal interests, and forge ahead with arguments for liberation.

Once this 'trumping thesis' is dismantled, we follow Zamir in search of a version of speciesism that actually *is* in opposition to liberationism. Along the way, he formulates six, only one of which he thinks liberationists should reject, namely, that any and all human interests trump any and all animal interests solely on the basis that those human interests belong to humans. Of course, this type of extreme speciesism is held by relatively few (thoughtful) individuals. And that is precisely Zamir's point. For if that is the case, then

there is no need for liberationists to waste time undermining this type of speciesism. Since five of the six versions of speciesism that Zamir formulates are consistent with liberationism, it behooves liberationists to abandon their theoretical moral highground and — for the sake of expediency — advocate a ‘speciesist liberationism’.

Next Zamir moves to one of the most refreshing aspects of the book. This highlights how the debate over moral standing is, at best, merely a distraction from the *real* issue at the heart of animal liberation, namely, whether animals possess morally relevant properties that imply restrictions on what may be done to them (which, of course, they do). After disintegrating neo-Kantian arguments against the moral status of animals, Zamir then salvages the morally-relevant-properties approach essential to utilitarianism (and the Rollin-modified version of utilitarianism), advocating what he calls a ‘single-stage’ approach to liberation which *assumes rather than argues for* the premise that animals possess morally relevant properties.

The first two chapters comprise the main argument of the book. The remaining six chapters (save one) include previously published (and persuasive) essays on a range of topics from vivisection and moral vegetarianism, to arguments for pet ownership and against zoos, to veganism (against) and animal-assisted therapies (for).

Overall, Zamir’s arguments are original, clever, and, for the most part, persuasive. Yet, there may seem, for most animal liberationists, something odd and unsettling about advocating a *speciesist* liberation, odd in the same sense that an argument for *racist* black liberation or a *sexist* women’s liberation movement might seem unsettling. To see what I’m getting at, first consider the type of speciesism that Zamir finds *compatible* with liberationism, and then consider an analogy. *Speciesism*: Human interests are more important than animal interests, in the sense that promoting even trivial human interests ought to take precedence over advancing animal interests. Only survival interests justify actively thwarting an animal’s survival interests (15). Now imagine a (very Singerian) analogy in which an abolitionist movement accepts the following version of racism. *Racism*: The interests of white persons are more important than the interests of black persons, in the sense that promoting even trivial white interests ought to take precedence over advancing black interests. Only survival interests justify actively thwarting a black person’s survival interests.

The analogy calls to mind the Fourth Lincoln-Douglas Debate of 1858 in which Abraham Lincoln declared, ‘I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race’ (‘The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858’).

Putting aside the complicated and imperspicuous legacy of Abraham Lincoln, advocates of black liberation might find a strategy like this disturbing, one that advocates liberation while sanctioning the sentiments of such a dec-

laration. Likewise with some animal liberationists with regard to Zamir's central thesis. Nevertheless, Zamir is an exceptionally clear writer whose book constitutes an important contribution to the literature on animal liberation. His book would surely fare well against any of Richard Posner's arguments.

Robert C. Jones
California State University, Chico