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Excerpt

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# Introduction: between exploitation and respectful coexistence

Raymond Corbey and Annette Lanjouw

This book deals with a variety of aspects of the relentless exploitation of billions of non-human individuals in the profit- and consumption-driven global economy, and the marginalization and forced extinction of countless other (than human) species in the wild. This is a profoundly political process. Politics can be characterized as the activities that people engage in to define and exercise power, status, or authority, either among states or among groups within a state. This definition allows for the application of a political lens over the attitudes and behaviors of humans with regard to other species. It is all about control and power.

The destructive aspects of human domination of other species in the ecosystems of this planet at large stand in stark contrast with the treatment of companion species such as dogs and cats. Ecological domination is usually attributed to the species that has the most influence on other species in the same environment. The human presence and impact on this planet is substantial and ever-growing in scale: through population growth, large-scale and expansive agriculture, industrial-scale farming and fisheries, urbanization and infrastructure development, extractive industries (mining, oil, and gas), commercial forestry, global trade and commerce, trade and transport of tens of thousands of species, extraction and use of freshwater, and the altering and polluting of ecosystems.

Control and destruction of individual non-human lives for selfish human purposes is legitimized by worldviews such as humanism, several monotheistic religions, and by the legal systems and political stances rooted in these traditions. The legitimization of discrimination by *Homo sapiens* against other sentient beings, however, is even more complex than that. Not only does it occur on cultural and discursive levels, but equally on psychological and evolutionary ones. A current definition of speciesism is discrimination against individuals on the basis of their species membership, taken to be morally relevant. The concept was coined in the early 1970s by analogy to racism, sexism, and classism. In racism, vilified non-human animals (apes, dogs, pigs, etc.) are often called upon to vilify other humans. Recent research suggests a role for species-wide evolved taxonomies in racism and speciesism (see Livingstone Smith, this volume), next to and entwined with culturally and historically situated “folk taxonomies.”

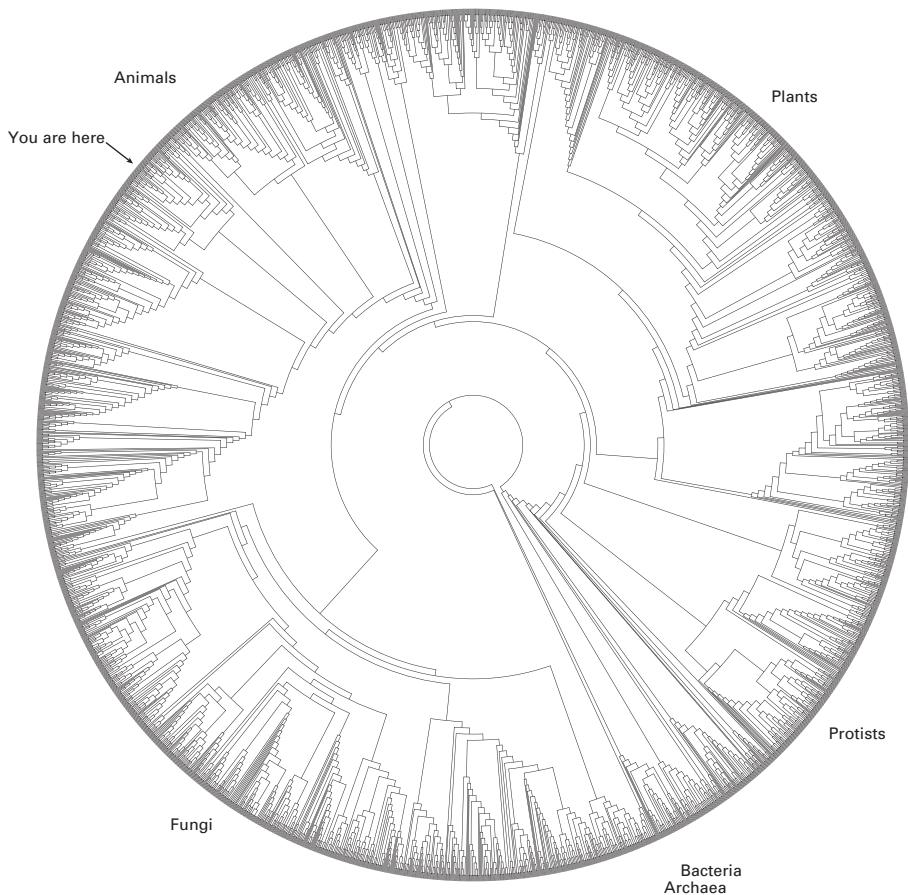
*The Politics of Species: Reshaping our Relationships with Other Animals*, eds R. Corbey and A. Lanjouw.  
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People the world over, from Amerindian villages in the rainforest of Amazonia to traders in the stock exchange of Beijing, categorize everything around them. A substantial part of the messy complexities of human dealings with other species has to do with how we categorize on various levels. “Discrimination” can be seen in two different ways: making distinctions in a neutral sense – that is, categorizing; and discriminating in a prejudicial and value-laden way. How people categorize is both morally and politically relevant. The thoroughly political distinction between human and non-human has been probably the most pervasive dominator hierarchy in Western cultural discourse and practice. In processes and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, various categories of humans – the enslaved, women, peasants, the poor, criminals, the mentally sick, the colonized – at various times were construed as “less” than “human.” Over time many of them have become, to some extent, emancipated. This is not the case for non-human individuals.

The institutionalized ecological dominance of humans can, ironically, itself again be analyzed – as has been done in detail by, among others, Jürgen Habermas and the Frankfurt School of cultural critique – in terms of a colonization of human personal lifeworlds by the blind systemic forces of technocracy and global markets. The latter tend to determine what humans should do and how they should live, instead of humans as individuals themselves, advancing their goals in a democratic political process. Thus when enslaving non-human animals, humans to some extent are enslaved themselves. However, the Frankfurt philosophers, in a humanist tradition, always had a sharper eye for the commodification and mistreatment within the human species than beyond it (but see Sanbonmatsu 2011; and Twine, this volume).

“Respectful coexistence” in the title of both this introduction and the third part of this volume refers to the ability to share resources and space, as well as to respect each other’s needs and self. The expression implies an acknowledgment of moral and social relevance. It has connotations of concern, heedfulness, care, and regard for the other. It reminds us of shared lives on the commons, the common village meadows that provided for all before the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968) happened: the depletion of shared resources by individuals acting according to their own self-interest and against the long-term best interests of all. Coexistence also suggests sharing space (Riley, this volume) and co-flourishing in environments thought of less as resources than as commons. It provides an angle on living with companion species, as well as on attitudes toward the rest of nature in many traditional, non-modern peoples.

“Respectful coexistence” may be seen by many as a rather Utopian phrase, not very analytical or pragmatic. It does, however, provide a provocative counter-image to the unbridled exploitation of animals in the globalized bioindustry and to the massive destruction of wildlife habitats. It resonates with the post-humanist idea of “multispecies ethnography” that puts numerous species and individuals center stage, focusing on how the “livelihoods of a multitude of organisms” both shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010: p. 545; Fuentes this volume; Kirksey, this volume; Riley, this volume). This fledgling paradigm provides a refreshing alternative to the two mainstream ways in which (other) animals are dealt with in traditional anthropology: animals as “good to eat” and animals as good



**Figure 1** Tree of life, based on rRNA, with 3,000 extant species sampled from an estimated nine million living species on the circumference of the circle. Life and speciation events begin 3.8 billion years ago in the center of the circle. The human species (upper left corner) is one of 200 living primate species and about 1.3 million known living animal species. Yet “animals” excludes humans in most contexts – everyday discourse, law, religion, politics, etc., even much scientific literature. Diagram and research data David M. Hillis, Derrick Zwickl, and Robin Gutell, University of Texas.

to think (or symbolize) with. In both cases, animals figure as part of the backdrop of human social worlds, not as subjects in their own right.

The first part of this book deals with the way that speciesist views and practices draw sharp boundaries between human individuals and individuals of all other animal species (Figure 1). All contributions, but those in the third part in particular, suggest new views of spatial, conceptual, and moral boundaries – as not so much separations and divisions, but openings, or dynamic contact zones, in which animals of all species share spaces and are entwined. This suggests redefinitions of moral and legal communities and new approaches for the spaces in which species interface: laboratories, meat and dairy farms, homes, nature reserves, wild spaces, agricultural

landscapes, urban spaces, veterinary hospitals, the entertainment industry, the wildlife trade, shelters, slaughterhouses, and zoos.

The chapters in the second part weigh various reasons for moving from speciesist exploitation to greater respectful coexistence. They look at what we have learned from research carried out in recent decades about the subjectivity and agency of individuals belonging to non-human species – the richness of their intelligence and emotions, the complexity of their interactions and communication. These new insights have played a key role in an immense increase in recent years of publications, academic disciplines, social movements, and political initiatives focusing on all sorts of aspects of the human interface with other animals.

Despite the continuing presence of Immanuel Kant (e.g., in Tom Regan’s influential work, or in political and legal discourse at large), much of present-day thinking about animals can be labelled as broadly post-humanist. This means that, as the editors of *Humanimalia* put it when this journal was launched in 2009, the human species is no longer posited “as the sovereign agent of the Earth, privileged either as a metaphysical or evolutionary preference by its proven intelligence, rationality, technology, or whatever other explanation is provided for its demonstrable ability to shape and overpower other elements in the natural world” (Humanimalifesto, 2009). Along similar lines the present volume pleads for a non-anthropocentric, non-ethnocentric, and non-egocentric stance, in close affinity with the life sciences, which usually were, and still are, shunned by the humanist tradition and the humanities that issued from it.

## Moving beyond speciesism (Part I)

Many categorizations, in particular those regarding human and other animals, are emotionally and value laden and are, or can quickly become, discriminatory. The drawing of lines between individuals belonging to different animal species is bad biology in view of the evidence for evolutionary continuity, argues ethologist **Marc Bekoff** in Chapter 1. It results in the establishment of false boundaries that have dire consequences for species deemed to be “lower” than others, such as ants, fish, birds, or rats. Most conservation efforts are directed at “higher” and charismatic animals. Speciesism, conscious and unconscious, is the main culprit in our interactions with other animals. It reinforces the property status of non-human animals and undermines our collective efforts to make the world a better place for all beings. Bekoff pleads for a “deep” ethology, studies of animals that take us not only into their minds but also into their hearts, as a beginning of expanding our “compassion footprint.”

**Joan Dunayer** (Chapter 2) adds to Bekoff’s challenge of the supremacy of “higher” species such as primates, cetaceans, elephants, and mammals in general, carrying the argument further: in her view, speciesism is the failure, on the basis of species membership or species-typical characteristics, to accord *any* sentient being equal consideration and respect. She criticizes old-speciesists, who limit rights to humans, but also new-speciesists, who advocate rights for relatively few non-humans, those who seem most human-like. Dunayer holds that it is fair, logical, and empirically justified to give all creatures with

a nervous system the benefit of any doubt regarding sentience and accord them basic rights such as rights to life and liberty.

The next two chapters, both written by philosophers with a strong background in psychology, discuss the formidable psychological barriers that prevent us from including non-human animals in a moral community of some kind. **David Livingstone Smith** (Chapter 3) argues that hierarchical thinking with humans on top may reflect deeply rooted, innate intuitions about the structure of the cosmos, bound up with our tendency to carve the world into essentialized natural kinds. Humans have often demonstrated that their view of who is human is based not on membership of the taxon *Homo sapiens*, but on membership of a natural kind, a notion that allows exclusion on the basis of, for example, race, religion, or appearance. Livingstone Smith lays bare psychological and discursive ties between, on the one hand, the dehumanization of the enslaved, the colonized, non-citizens, and enemies in war, and, on the other hand, the treatment of other than human animals.

**Edouard Machery** (Chapter 4) also compares the way we tend to think about races and about species. He examines whether three possible strategies that have been successful in addressing racism and some other forms of discrimination can be applied to our attitudes toward non-human animals, in particular other great apes. Machery suggests that of these three strategies individualization has the best chance of success, because moral emotions as well as capacities for empathy and sympathy are more likely to be engaged by individuals than by groups. This approach has been taken in several conservation spheres with the “adoption” concept.

Philosopher and anthropologist **Raymond Corbey** (Chapter 5) shows how, ironically, racism has often been combated on the basis of speciesist assumptions, in particular in the humanist post-World War II United Nations discourse on human rights. He traces those assumptions to various roots – in biological and anthropological thinking of the period, European metaphysics, middle-class cultural attitudes, and, ultimately, evolution. The subsequent Great Ape Project, which claimed moral respectability for all great apes, ran into a similar problem. Corbey also makes some observations on the ritual, performative character of various declarations of the rights of human and non-human beings.

In Chapter 6 sociologist **Richard Twine** approaches the mistreatment of livestock in the “animal–industrial complex” from the critical, left tradition in social science and political thought, in particular the emerging interdisciplinary field of critical animal studies. He shows how firmly speciesism is embedded in the global capitalist order with its routines of industrialized, commodified killing of contemptible, consumable, and enslaved non-human beings. Greater meat and dairy consumption is encouraged in the developing world and “superior” farming and breeding techniques and genetics are imposed on poor countries.

## Sentience and agency (Part II)

Sentience is the condition or quality of being conscious and susceptible to sensation and emotion. Only sentient beings can suffer. There is no consensus among scientists how widespread sentience is in the animal kingdom. Agency is the ability or capacity to act

in the world, to make choices. Traditionally and predominantly understood as *human* agency, the word carries connotations of personhood: of intentional, free, and therefore morally and legally relevant, action. Other animals, correspondingly, were understood not to be agents taking initiatives in the same, full sense as humans, but merely to be showing reactive behavior as a deterministic process. In Western moral philosophy, moral agency has usually been seen as a prerequisite for moral considerability.

A third relevant concept, next and connected to sentience and agency, is subjectivity, in the sense of having its, her, his own perspective, first person point of view; having thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires that intend, mean, are about something. Subjectivity is what it is like to be something, what distinguishes a subject from a thing, in contrast to objectivity. Agency and subjectivity are central concepts in the hermeneutic or interpretive tradition in continental-European and anglophone analytic philosophy. They are associated with reasons rather than causes; actions rather than events; with the reasonableness and rationality of the subjects involved – usually, implicitly or explicitly, taken to be humans.

**Lori Marino**, a behavioral neuroscientist, deals with the sentience and agency of dolphins and other cetaceans (Chapter 7). They continue to be treated as non-sentient objects, commodities and resources, despite what is known about their intelligence, self-awareness, learning skills, social communication, and rich emotional lives. Marino discusses the effects of this mistreatment – such as aberrant behavior, stress, disease, and mortality – and the reasons it continues, pleading for the recognition of cetacean personhood and moral standing. But cetaceans, unlike other (than human) great apes, look and move differently, lack changes in clearly recognizable facial expressions, communicate in strange modalities, live in a very different physical environment, and seem to possess a level of social cohesion foreign even to us. This is an obstacle to moral inclusion. Cetaceans represent extremes of similarities and differences that challenge our ability to recognize them as moral equals. Therefore they are among the most vulnerable and the most bewildering non-human animals.

In Chapter 8 anthropologist **Barbara King** concurs with Marino's plea on the basis of an abundance of evidence for love and grief behaviors among non-human animals. A wide variety of animals – chimpanzees, elephants, ravens and geese, dogs and cats, maybe even turtles – respond differently to dead companions than to injured ones; express deep and prolonged sadness at the loss of a loved one; and in some cases participate in ritual behaviors around death. The occurrence and intensity of these behaviors varies between species and between individuals, and between wild and captive animals. This has profound implications for the humane treatment of apes in captivity, for example in allowing them time with a dying or dead member of their group.

The next two chapters on animal subjectivity, again by philosophers, both concern “theory of mind”: the ability to attribute mental states of various sorts to others. Such complex cognitive abilities are often adduced as a reason for moral concern. **Kristin Andrews** (Chapter 9) holds that what appears to be a “higher” cognitive capacity in humans is in fact the result of many simpler heuristics, including capacities humans share with other animals. It is the need to explain behavior that drove the evolution of mindreading, and this, in turn, required a prior understanding of social norms. She



suggests that researchers need to stop focusing on how complex animals are and first realize how simple humans may be. One consequence of this position is that mind-reading should not be a requirement for either moral or legal standing. **Daniel Hutto** (Chapter 10), in discussion with Andrews, also thinks that we are setting the bar too high for apes and mindreading. He too, from a slightly different angle, moves humans closer to other species who read minds. Both non-human and human apes, and human children too, engage with other minds in an emotionally charged, “enactive,” and non-representational way, without “higher”, representational cognition.

Primatologists **Lucy Birkett** and **William McGrew** (Chapter 11) compare ape behavior in nature with that in captivity. While they are spared predation and other threats, captive apes live in forced social environments; are deprived of the ability to roam, forage, engage in group fission/fusion; and may endure constant human exposure. Birkett and McGrew present plentiful evidence for emotional distress in captive chimpanzees, measured by abnormal behaviors such as eating feces, drinking urine, plucking out hair, and self-harming. This evidence shows how vulnerable, self-aware, emotive, and smart ape minds are to distortion and suffering in all captive environments, even in “good” zoos. They argue that the only defensible reason for keeping apes in captivity is to offer lifelong sanctuary to those who cannot be returned to nature.

A surprisingly different perspective on animal sentience and agency is present in many traditional, less modernized, small-scale societies like the Mentawai shifting cultivators and Kerinci farmers of Sumatra, as studied by **Jet Bakels**, a cultural anthropologist, in her fieldwork (Chapter 12). They conceive of animals such as the tiger and the crocodile as persons who are part of society as a moral order, and entertain respectful reciprocal relations with them. Forest spirits are owners of forest animals, and humans must behave as guests in the forest. Bakels sees the respect and generosity these animals are often treated with in such traditional settings worldwide as a source of inspiration for modernized societies in their struggle with moral inconsistencies with respect to animals. Although this set of beliefs has generally served these traditional societies and the natural world well, economic development is now threatening it and changing behavior.

Another exercise in multispecies ethnography and plea for entangled empathy in the sense of Lori Gruen (see below) is provided by anthropologist **Eben Kirksey**, in Chapter 13. He studied the complex agency, sociality, and multispecies entanglements of *Ectatomma* ant entrepreneurs in the shadow of humans in forested landscapes, agricultural fields, and parking lots of Central and South America. Kirksey analyzes these settings unorthodoxly as “cosmopolitical” worlds, where beings are involved in a complex web of mutual use and exploitation in which each has an interest in the survival of the other.

### Toward respectful coexistence (Part III)

Although not explicitly following “multispecies ethnography” as a new paradigm, all contributors to Part III are close and sympathetic to it. Anthropologist–primatologist **Agustín Fuentes**, for one, explores an ethnoprimateological approach to the integration,

engagement, and interface between ourselves and other primates (Chapter 14). Ethno-primateology is the study of how a people (“ethnos”) or society deals with other primates (alloprimates). Fuentes reappraises the way the human–alloprimate interface is shaped by shared histories, economies, cultures, and landscapes as well as each species’ behavior and physiologies. Human relationships with other animals are complex, culturally contingent and contextual: no uniform or simple perspectives – ethical, ecological, ethnological, or literary – can effectively categorize them. Bonding and cooperation play a significant role in social niche construction among primates and in humans the emergence of regular altruism is likely related to an expansion of this core primate pattern. A distinctive evolutionary discontinuity is that humans can cast this physiological, social, and symbolic bonding “net” beyond biological kin and even beyond our species. This may point to an evolutionary pattern, a human adaptation, which is ready made to bring others into moral equivalencies and social kinship with us. A less positive evolutionary discontinuity is the distinctly human evolutionary trajectory of niche alteration for the benefit of human populations and the detriment of many other species.

Anthropologist–primatologist **Erin Riley**, concurring with Fuentes and adding to Bakels’ analysis of non-modern views of nature, provides a case study from the highlands of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia (Chapter 15). She examines how native villagers and migrants perceive nature and how they share ecological space with Tonkean macaques in particular. Local people are more positive about implications of the Lore Lindu National Park, viewing it as a source of livelihood. Migrants are less positive, while locals view migrants as a threat to the forest. Both locals and migrants believe that monkeys are reincarnated or somehow recreated humans, who should be respected and never killed. But it is dangerous to rely on cultural traditions for conservation, as economic and development opportunities render them vulnerable. Riley discusses her ethnoprimatological findings in the context of change and the politically and ethically charged arena of biodiversity conservation.

**Annette Lanjouw**, a conservationist and primatologist, reflecting on her experiences in building institutional and individual capacity in wildlife conservation in Africa, takes a wider view again in Chapter 16. She elaborates on strategies for holistic approaches in conservation and engendering respect for non-human animals. Although the focus of her career has been on great apes, her argument for a focus on charismatic species can be applied to other species equally, and benefit broader ecosystems and landscapes.

The next chapter (Chapter 17), by **Molly Mullin**, a cultural anthropologist with a longstanding interest in human–animal relationships, is an essay in the cultural politics of poultry. Mullin reports on her two-year research project on the historical backgrounds and contradictions of backyard and urban chicken keeping in the United States. This practice raises questions about environments, animal welfare, political geography, relationships among species, and even neoliberal economics. It is a mistake, she argues, to dismiss anyone involved in exploiting animals for food as devoid of moral conscience. Ethnographic research on chickens as well as other animals often has revealed humans capable of caring for animals and exploiting them at the same time. There is no neat and tidy evolution from wild to domestic, from pre-modern to modern, or from not caring to caring about animal well-being.



Philosopher **Lori Gruen** (Chapter 18) identifies and criticizes discrimination against other animals as “humanormative” – presupposing that the human species provides the normative measure against which other species are to be judged deficient or deviant. “Entangled empathy” is a moral counterstrategy that helps to develop reflective responses to the lives and interests of others. Gruen discusses various empathetic failures: over- and under-empathetic responses are both a danger, particularly in relation to animals, who cannot easily correct such errors of perception. We can pay more attention to making better choices and promoting the well-being of those with whom we are entangled. Thinking harder not just about the nature of these relations, but also about how to be in ethical relations with a range of other beings, is an interesting under-explored project that becomes possible once we stop focusing exclusively on the properties that make us similar.

**Hope Ferdowsian**, physician, and **Chong Choe**, lawyer and philosopher, re-evaluate the ethics of using non-human animals in experimentation in Chapter 19. They do so from the perspective of human research protections in the United States, taking into account the potential for mental and physical suffering (cf. Chapter 11 by Birkett and McGrew, and Chapter 7 by Marino) of the species involved. The arbitrary nature of some current research legislation in the United States – which, for example, excludes birds, rats, and mice bred for research from being considered animals – makes this project all the more urgent. Animals grown for food are also excluded from the US Animal Welfare Act. Key concepts in their principled approach are autonomy, vulnerability, beneficence, and justice.

Finally **Steve Wise**, who has been practicing animal law for three decades, analyzes the modern legal system’s treatment of animals and its historical background (Chapter 20). Humans are “legal persons,” non-human animals, “legal things.” A legal person has the capacity to possess legal rights; one who possesses a legal right is a legal person. “Legal things” lack the capacity to possess legal rights; they are invisible to civil law. Wise explains the Nonhuman Rights Project, which supports the filing of lawsuits intended to pave the way for an American state High Court to declare, for the first time, that a non-human animal is a legal person and has the capacity to possess a legal right. Many judges believe that common law structure requires them to bring a common law rule at odds with social morality, public policy, or human experience into harmony with modern understandings. Wise discusses qualities proposed for legal personhood, including autonomy; having preferences and being able to act to satisfy them; being able to cope with changed circumstances; and having desires and beliefs. Chimps and other apes and various other species clearly have this and so should be entitled to legal personhood and basic legal rights.

## Overcoming resistance

The 20 chapters together offer an inventory of the determinants of our dealings with other animals: religious, moral, political, and everyday discourse; the global capitalist system and its ecological effects; evolved cognitive and motivational predispositions.

These determinants are in fact formidable obstacles to redefining moral and legal communities. To reflect this, perhaps a question mark could have been added to the optimistic title of the third part of this book: “Toward respectful coexistence.”

As converging twentieth century developments in biology and philosophy have made abundantly clear, there are no fixed Aristotelian, scholastic, folk taxonomical or evolved essences to species, despite widespread reluctance to admit this (Livingstone Smith, this volume; Corbey, this volume). The concept of a “human nature” is the last bastion of essentialism, and a significant barrier to reshaping our relationships with other animals. The view that humans have a fixed essence, and, as self-conscious, free willing and morally responsible beings, a unique dignity and moral status, resists revision. It still permeates legal systems, political ideologies, religions, the humanities, and everyday discourse the world over, legitimizing our ongoing and massive exploitation of other species.

There is, however, now a broad scientific and philosophical consensus that discriminating on the basis of the underlying “essential nature” of living beings makes no sense. Living nature is to be explained in terms of variation, continuity, and change. It is variable and fuzzy. It underdetermines our value-laden pigeonholing and permits many classifications, in science and everyday life. How we classify depends on context and purpose; and is open to negotiation. As massive and pervasive the factors determining the human domination over nature may be, human discourse, including the values and discriminations it poses, is variable – historically situated and culturally specific. It changes over time. Post-Wittgensteinian philosophy, cultural anthropology, and cultural studies converge in stressing that vocabularies are but tools that are to be assessed in terms of the particular purposes they may serve, when ordering, describing, predicting, or providing a handle on things. They are man-made fabrics underdetermined by reality, leaving much latitude of choice. They are not true but useful.

As the philosopher Richard Rorty put it, in a pragmatist tradition: “No description of how things are from a God’s-eye point of view, no skyhook provided by some contemporary or yet-to-be-developed science, is going to free us from the contingency of having been acculturated as we were. Our acculturation is what makes certain options live, or momentous, or forced, while leaving others dead, or trivial, or optional” (Rorty, 1991, p. 13). This even creates room for negotiating tendencies in our evolved human nature.

Perhaps this more optimistic observation can somewhat balance our pessimistic remarks in the foregoing pages. Rather than claiming that there is an absolute truth or objective reality, the needs and interests of all individuals who are concerned must be invoked in order to legitimize our inferential and other practices. This includes the changes and renewal that would be necessary in ethics, laws, laboratory routines, political programs, animal farming, conservation, and all other dealings with other sentient beings.

## Chicken cauda

Because this book attempts, but does not entirely manage, to avoid a bias toward “higher” animals we would like to end this introduction with a word on chickens, who figure in the chapters by Bekoff and Dunayer on speciesism (Chapters 1 and 2),