

What is speciesism, and is it justified? Apply your answer to the global meat production industry.

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The issue of this essay is the definition and the justification of speciesism; as well as its application to the global meat production industry. In regards to the issue of speciesism's justification, the focus is particularly on the damage such an oppression causes compared to the benefit and positive impact industries such as the global meat market have on the world, such as lowered meat production costs. Below I shall discuss the difficulties in achieving a set definition on speciesism while presenting the most accurate explanation of the subject. Furthermore, I shall cover positions taken by various philosophers in order to oppose as well as justify the act of speciesism. Finally, I will cover the application of the aforementioned topics to the global meat production industry.

In this section, I shall define speciesism from multiple perspectives as well as providing an example of what speciesism is in practice in an attempt to answer the question: "What is speciesism...?". This will include analysis and reference from "Defining Speciesism", published by Oscar Horta and Frauke Albersmeier; as well as the use of R D Ryder's "Speciesism again: The original leaflet". In layman's terms, speciesism can be considered "...the plight of the other species and our own." (Ryder, 2010), however throughout the years since the term's coinage in 1970 it has had many usages by animal rights activists and philosophers alike (Horta and Albersmeier, 2020). Furthermore, all areas of discrimination are heavily layered subjects and do not have a simple *formula for oppression* with a black and white explanation. The mindset of discrimination is affected by different influences and complexities; this inability to provide clarity leads to the term speciesism being used by many, with those often holding different interpretations, simply using the term in order to further their stance or position. This has led to the degradation of the term and increased the difficulty of providing a definition to speciesism. It is of considerable interest that while there has been significant effort in acting against speciesism, there has been little to cement a definition of speciesism comparable to those affecting the human animal; indicating a human hierarchy of discrimination. This in itself is speciesism-by-omission, despite the lack of intent to discriminate, agents can be unconscious of the speciesist view they hold (Horta and Albersmeier, 2020). Horta and Albersmeier, in their article "Defining Speciesism", provide a simplistic definition, designed to consider all types of treatment and considerations as well as being broad in scope: "Speciesism is the unjustified comparatively worse consideration or treatment of those who do not belong to a certain species". (Horta and Albersmeier, 2020, p3). Although this definition does indeed have its aforementioned broad scope, and is able to consider different types of treatment, it does have flaws to be considered: for example, the term species is difficult in itself to define, humans ourselves have provided examples of such difficulties with historical accounts of discrimination based on the assumption people of colour and in particular the black population of Africa were not considered human (Horta and Albersmeier, 2020), although a specific and outdated example, the premiss of false categorisation causing issues within the idea of *a species* remains relevant. Despite the efforts "Defining Speciesism" went on in order to come to a conclusive definition, an answer to the question "What is speciesism...?" can still be considered ambiguous as it fails to explain the reasons why factors such as "worse consideration" would be considered speciesist, therefore I shall move onto another more philosophical approach.

Through the application of Peter Singer's logic used in his principle of equality, we are able to discern another answer to "What is speciesism...?". For Singer, "Equality is a moral idea, not an assertion of fact." (Singer, 1975, p703). What he bases his principle of equality on is the equal consideration of interests, giving those interests the same moral weight no matter the being in which

those interests occur. In that sense, if we subscribe to the guidelines for equality laid out by Singer, we are able to define speciesism as the failure to give equal consideration to the interests of a certain species based upon prejudices and feelings of superiority, or as he puts it in his own words: "...prejudice... in favour of the interests of members of one's own species" (Singer, 1975, p704). When discussing discrimination, Singer does not avoid the clear factual differences in various faculties between humans in relation to both the sexes and race, doing so allows Singer to apply his principle of equality to nonhuman animals. For Singer, the superiority of one's self in an area such as mental capacity, despite this area being factually greater due to evidence from something such as an IQ test, is not justification for discrimination; if factual differences are not a basis for discrimination due to equality being a moral idea, the idea that this principle of equality does not apply to nonhumans is flawed. In Short, Singer's definition of speciesism provides a simple extension of the current woke attitude to other discriminatory prejudices, it is a moral formula people are able to recognise from the case against both racism and sexism, focusing on the rejection of exploitation based upon supposed superiority in faculties because of a moral idea.

In a practical answer to the question: "What is speciesism...?", the meat industry, and in particular the factory farming sector, provide clear and evident examples of the disregard for nonhuman interests. A statement given by the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds stresses that "Typically, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreaks are associated with intensive domestic poultry production..." (Compassion In World Farming, 2020, p5)(See Image 4), this highlights the damage caused by factory farming; this sentiment is reinforced further by later writings in the same piece which detail that low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) viruses naturally affect the populations of wild birds, however industrial environments such as the conditions found in factory farms facilitate the evolution of LPAI viruses into HPAI viruses (CIWF, 2020). Factory farms provide a constant supply of hosts for such viruses, creating a culture in which highly virulent strains can emerge (CIWF, 2020)(See Image 4); despite these clear negative outcomes, evidently and obviously caused by the operations ran by factory poultry farms, humans continue to produce meat in such a manor, with the UK alone having 575 CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations)(See Image 3), housing at least 125,000 broilers (See Image 5) (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2018). This is an unpleasant yet common practical example of what speciesism is in the modern world, particularly in application to the meat industry.

Having addressed the question: "What is speciesism...?" In the section above, I shall now consider whether speciesism is justified, with specific application to the global meat production industry. I shall do this by considering financial and environmental influences, using information gained from articles from sources such as Food and Water Watch as well as reports from the IMF. I shall also refer to the approaches of philosophers such as R G Frey and Marc Bekoff. The following information on the financial aspect of factory farming is specific to the US, however, the overarching justifications and rebuffs are also applicable to most nations within the global north. Traditionally, farmers would grow the feed needed to sustain their animals over the winter themselves as the cost to purchase feed was considerably higher than producing it yourself. Due to considerable mismanagement by congress in the late 20th century, they allowed crop prices to fall below their production cost, the government paid farmers a portion of the difference with taxpayer dollars which indirectly subsidised discounted commodity purchases by factory farms (Food and Water Watch, 2020). These indirect subsidies for artificially low-priced feed drastically reduced one of the core costs for factory farming and the global meat production industry as a whole: the cost of purchasing enough grain to feed the thousands of livestock (Food and Water Watch, 2020)(see image 1). Food and Water Watch (2020) states that according to a 2007 Tufts University study factory farms in the US

saved \$34.8 billion between 1997 and 2005 due to the cost of feed remaining below production cost. This is a key factor in the arguments made to support factory farming, based upon its low cost and efficiency. The huge financial savings of factory farming presented would provide a good basis to argue in favour of industrial meat production and go some distance in justifying the damage inflicted upon animals; taking a utilitarian approach, if you are to hedonically compare the pain of a less intelligent species to the considerable amount of money saved simply through the lower cost of feed, let alone other financial factors, factory farming could be considered an overall net positive, providing the greatest good for the greatest number.

However, the fact that feed prices have not remained static works against the aforementioned positive. In 2007 and 2008, commodity prices and the cost of feed rose, which led to factory farms seeing a significant drop in profit (Food and Water Watch, 2010); additionally, this increase in commodity prices has not decreased or slowed down. In 2022, growth remained strong, seeing supply chain issues and global tensions push feed prices to increase by 14.2%, this is in combination with an annualised growth of 6.6% from 2017 to 22 (IBISWorld, 2022)(See Image 2). As a key component to factory farming operations, this increase in cost works to negate the aforementioned positives of financial savings; the issues are only set to worsen with the global economy seeing its "...weakest growth profile since 2001 except for the global financial crisis and the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic" (IMF, 2022). Overall, this suggests that there is no longer or a decreasing net positive to the harm caused by speciesism and the lack of consideration for welfare in the global meat production industry, reducing the ability to justify the discrimination.

To consider a philosophical approach to the justification of speciesism, we can consider the works of Raymond G. Frey, a noted critic of animal rights. Frey writes from the perspective of preference utilitarianism: a form of utilitarianism that values actions that fulfil the most personal interests rather than actions that generate the most pleasure. Frey disagrees with Peter Singer's work: "Animal Liberation" (1975), and his principle that nonhuman animal interests must be included when judging the consequences of an act; for Frey interests are dependent on desires, which he argues one cannot have without a corresponding belief, this leads him to the conclusion that animals cannot have rights due to their lack of "interests, emotions, beliefs, desires, concepts, perceptions or reasons for acting. They lack these things because they cannot speak" (Midgley, 1981, p379). He argues further that they are unable to comprehend beliefs because that function requires an understanding of language - they are unable to hold declarative sentences. In application to the global meat production industry, Frey justifies the participation in the inherently speciesist industry of factory farming, despite the practices clear refusal to consider the interests of nonhuman livestock Frey suggests that "The human carnivore, as he would have it, who merely buys and eats meat, bears no responsibility for what the factory farmer or the butcher did" (Franklin, 2004, p3). Although certainly an attempt to justify speciesism, Frey's attempts fall short of producing a convincing argument, it is agreeable that conversations over animal rights run into trouble, however if Frey wants to base all morality on the ability to speak then he is inadvertently suggesting newborns, the physically impaired or the mentally challenged do not possess rights either. Frey's arguments and justifications fall short and could be interpreted to take offence. As biologist Marc Bekoff puts it: Human beings are a part of the animal kingdom, not apart from it. The separation of 'us' and 'them' creates a false picture and is responsible for much suffering." (Bekoff, 2007, p170)

The above essay has addressed the issue of defining speciesism. It has presented an approach formulated from a systematic consideration of different influences as well as covering definitions from the philosophical viewpoint. I have also investigated speciesism in practice, in relation to the

global meat production industry and whether such discrimination is justified in doing so. Further justification for speciesism has also been briefly investigated and swiftly rejected. Speciesism is at best a misguided illusion of superiority through a lack of consideration and unawareness of our position of privilege as the most powerful species on the planet, discrimination committed through an ignorant mindset instilled in humans, unaware we are oppressing animals to the extent we are, at worst it is a lack of consideration of nonhuman interests simply to achieve personal gain, say, for example, the abhorrent and vile conditions factory farms subject their livestock to in order to achieve a more desirable profit margin. In relation to the global meat production industry, I firmly do not believe that speciesism is justified.

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Image Appendix

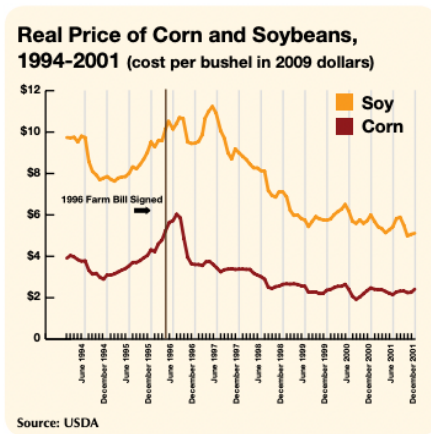


Image 1

(2010) *How America Turned Its Livestock Farms into Factories*. Food and Water Watch.

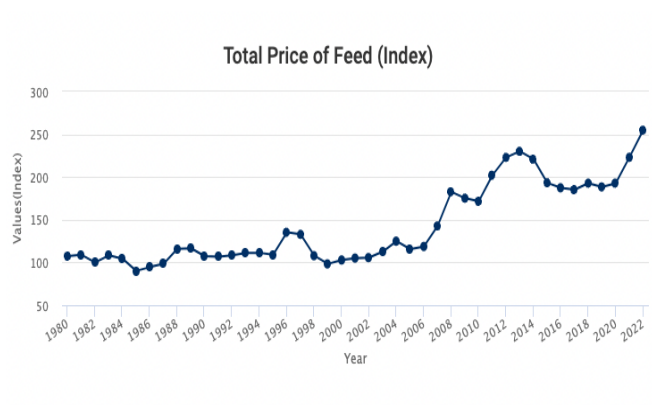


Image 2

(2022) *Price of Feed*. IBISWorld. Available at: <https://www.ibisworld.com/us/bed/price-of-feed/745/>.



Image 3

McArthur, J.-A. (2018) *Aerial views of CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) farms*. North Carolina, USA.



Image 4

de Martigny, V. (2022) *The discarded carcasses of dead Pekin ducks lie in a dumpster after an outbreak of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1).* Racine, Quebec, Canada.



Image 5

Shoshan, O. (2020) *A large group of broiler chickens sit in the dirt inside a crowded barn in Israel.* Israel.