Arhe XIX, 38/2022
UDK 179
DOI https://doi.org/10.19090/arhe.2022.38.183-206
Originalni naučni rad
Original Scientific Article

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"HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM": THE GREEK ORIGINS OF A MODERN CONCEPTAND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LIVES OF ANIMALS

Abstract: The modern philosophical doctrine usually termed "human exceptionalism," which holds that human beings, because of their perceived intellectual superiority over other animal species, have a moral value that cannot be claimed by other species which entitles humans to use other animals to serve their needs, has its philosophical roots in Greek philosophy, especially in the works of Aristotle and in the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis*, which holds that human beings share a kinship with other humans but not with other species of inferior intellectual endowments. The doctrine of "human exceptionalism" is used in the twenty-first century to justify the wholesale slaughter worldwide of non-human animals for food, clothing, medical and entertainment purposes. The claims of "human exceptionalism" are countered in the present day by animal rights philosophers and by animal welfarists of various types who argue either that non-human species have a sufficient degree of reason to entitle them to inclusion in the sphere of human moral concern, or that the possession of reason is itself an irrelevant criterion for moral consideration, and that animal suffering must be taken into account in human interactions with other animal species.
Keywords: human exceptionalism, speciesism, anthropocentrism, Stoicism, *oikeiōsis*, cognitive ethology, kinship

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The question of the moral standing of non-human animals is one of the most hotly-debated topics in twenty-first century intellectual circles in North America and in Europe, and that debate has enormous practical consequences for the fate of billions of non-human animals on a daily basis, in every country on earth. The livelihoods of thousands of human beings, in numerous industries worldwide, from food production to cosmetics marketing to clothing manufacture to circus acts, depend directly on the exploitation and often destruction of countless non-human animals annually. Those whose lives depend on the exploitation of other species, whatever their fields of endeavor, maintain that alterations to this situation will inevitably lead to the downfall of these industries and to catastrophic economic disruptions. At the same time, non-human animals have dedicated, even, as some of their opponents view their activities, fanatical individuals and organizations whose efforts are directed at mitigating if not eradicating what they view as the cruel exploitation of other species, and they have scored spectacular victories, seen, for example, in the decision by some clothing manufacturers to discontinue the use of fur and leather, in the cessation of animal acts in circuses, in the elimination of animal testing by manufacturers of healthcare products, and in the passage of legislation by some world governments that improve the conditions of farm animals intended for human consumption.[2]

Organized attempts of these sorts to advocate for the interests of non-human animals, in any sphere of activity, hardly precede the nineteenth century, and even the most historically-informed animal advocates and historians of the animal rights and animal welfare movements, seem curiously oblivious to the appearance of issues and

[2] Regular updates of successes, in countries around the world, in efforts to mitigate atrocities committed against non-human animals in industries that profit from their exploitation and destruction can be found in the newsletters of the American animal rights organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), whose motto is "Animals are not ours to experiment on, eat, wear, use for amusement, or abuse in any way." On PETA, see below, p. 9.

arguments in defense of other animal species in texts that precede the nineteenth century. The historical consciousness of many modern animal advocates reaches back only to the foundation of animal welfare organizations and humane societies in Europe and the United States, which are predominantly late-nineteenth-century phenomena.[3] Conversely, classical scholars who study accounts of human/non-human animal interactions in Greco-Roman sources often remain unaware that ideas advanced in classical authors live on in the debates of moral philosophers and ethologists in the twenty-first century. One current debate that has profound implications for the lives of non-human animals, in almost every interaction between the species, and that can be shown to have antecedents in Greek philosophical thought, focuses on the validity of the concept most frequently designated, especially in sources favorable to its claims, as "human exceptionalism." The terms "anthropocentrism,"[4] "humanocentrism," and "speciesism"[5] are applied

[3] A useful survey of the history of animal welfare agencies and humane societies in European countries, from 1700-1960, with a focus on Britain, is provided in Richard D. Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes towards Speciesism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 59-306.

[4] For an excellent study of the historical development of the concept of anthropocentrism, from the Homeric period to the twenty-first century, and of efforts to combat its influence, see Gary Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005). Steiner, p. 2, defines anthropocentrism, as it manifested itself in classical antiquity, as fundamentally a worldview "according to which animals are inferior to humans in the cosmic order. In fact, many anthropocentric thinkers assert that the gods created animals expressly for the sake of human beings." For a classic articulation of this attitude, in Cicero, see note 19. A reasoned assessment of the logical weaknesses inherent in the anthropocentric stance is found in Rob Boddice, "The End of Anthropocentrism," in Rob Boddice, ed., *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 1-18.

[5] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* New York: Avon Books, 1990; revised edition) p. 6, defines speciesism and underlines its inherent dangers,

to the concept at times by those who oppose its stance on human/non-human animal relations. The term "human supremacism" is also encountered when the wholesale destruction of the ecosystem by human beings is under discussion. An at least implicit belief in the validity of the ideas encompassed in the concept "human exceptionalism" underpins and justifies the sorts of uses and abuses of non-human animal species catalogued above.

The designation "human exceptionalism" tends to be used, in current philosophical discourse, to refer especially to what might be defined as a "moralized" understanding of "anthropocentrism," according to which the intellectual superiority of human beings over other animal species affords humans a moral standing that cannot be claimed by other species and that allows humans to make use of other species to serve their needs and interests. Historically, the superiority that humans claim over other species has been consistently grounded in the assertion that only humans are truly rational animals. American animal rights philosopher Gary Steiner articulates this understanding of "human exceptionalism" when he observes, "To suppose that human beings are the only living beings who can respond rather than merely react is to subscribe to the thesis of human exceptionalism, according to which human beings are morally superior to all nonhuman beings because only human beings possess the cognitive apparatus that makes it possible for life to matter."[6] In contrast, American philosopher and defender of the validity of the prerogatives of "human exceptionalism Tibor R. Machan adopts a diametrically opposed stance on the question, and offers a bluntly-worded assessment of the connection between rationality and moral value in the concept of "human exceptionalism" in his assertion, "…Beings that lack a rational faculty also lack the capacity to contribute

"Speciesism — the word is not an attractive one, but I can think of no better term — is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of one's own species and against those of members of another species." On speciesism, see also in general Ryder (note 3 above).

[6] Gary Steiner, *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 92.

creatively to the values in nature."[7] In consequence, he argues, "It is right to exploit nature to promote our own lives and happiness."[8]

The modern concept of "human exceptionalism" finds a close parallel and intellectual precursor in the Greek claim that "man alone of animals" (*μόνον τῶν ζῴων ἄνθρωπος*) as the phrase is most frequently worded in Greek texts, possesses one or another endowment that places human beings above, if not indeed somehow outside of, the remainder of animal creation. Greek literature is replete with assertions of man's special status in the hierarchy of animal creation that employ, verbatim and in many variants, the phrase "man alone of animals." Claims of the "man alone of animals" type made in classical literature refer in the vast majority of instances to aspects of human intellectual capacities, although claims that humans possess unique anatomical and emotional dimensions are found as well. While employed in earlier Greek sources to argue simply that human beings are *different* from other species, the phrase came in the hands of the Stoics to be used to argue that humans are *better* than other species. The Stoics employed the concept to bolster their contention that, in modern parlance, humans, because of their differences from other species, have a *value* that other species do not, and that their lives therefore *matter* in ways that those of other species cannot. The Stoic articulation of the question is remarkably close to Steiner's and Machan's definitions of "human exceptionalism." For the Stoics, the vastly superior intellectual endowments of humans, specifically their unique possession of *λόγος* ("reason"), confer upon them a moral standing that the remainder of animal creation, devoid of *λόγος*, does not possess. Modern champions of the position called "human exceptionalism" advance arguments that bear a striking similarity to those set forth by Greek philosophers and naturalists in whose works we find examples of claims of the "man alone of animals" type.

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[7] Tibor R. Machan, *Putting Humans First: Why We Are Nature's Favorite* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), p. 36.

[8] Machan, p. xv.

The appearance of this "man alone of animals" concept in classical literature was analyzed systematically by American classical scholar Robert Renehan in his study "The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man," in which he traced what may justly be viewed as the classical antecedents to the concept now termed "human exceptionalism."[9] Renehan maintained that, by the fourth century BCE, the definition of man as an animal distinguished from other animals by his possession of reason appeared regularly in Greek philosophical texts, and that observations concerning various dimensions of human intellectual uniqueness employed phraseology so formulaic that he labeled them a kind of "man alone of animals *topos*." "Man alone of animals,"[10] according to the formula, has reason, memory, beliefs, syntax, a self-image, a knowledge of the future, a concept of death, a conception of the divine, and endless other capacities. Renehan considered the application of this *topos* to be a reflection of an attitude toward man and toward other animals that he declared to be severely anthropocentric, and that took as its starting point the assumption that man differs from other animals most especially in his rationality, a view that has, as Renehan correctly maintained, become so widely accepted in subsequent Western thought that its Greek origin became obscured.

Renehan accords brief consideration to what he terms "anatomical and physiological features which are peculiar to 'man alone of animals'," but most Greek claims of human uniqueness analyzed by Renehan pertain to aspects of man's *intellectual* capacities as a rational animal. Isolated observations on man's *intellectual* uniqueness are encountered already in the fragments of Presocratic philosophy. What is

[9] Robert Renehan, "The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man," *HSCPh* 85 (1981), pp. 239-259.

[10] For a detailed examination of claims of the "man alone of animals" type in Greek and Latin literature, in its intellectual, anatomical and emotional manifestations, and for a discussion of the persistence of this commonplace in post-classical usage, see Stephen T. Newmyer, *The Animal and the Human in Ancient and Modern Thought: The 'Man Alone of Animals' Concept* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

generally viewed as the earliest extant "man alone of animals" assertion that views the intellectual capacities of other animal species negatively vis-à-vis those of human beings is cited in the treatise *De sensu* by Theophrastus, wherein he remarks that the physician Alcmaeon of Croton maintained that "man alone of animals" "understands" (*ξυνίησι*) while other animals merely "perceive" (*αἰσθάνεται*) but do not understand.[11] Since Alcmaeon was a physician, and may have made his comments in consequence of his scientific researches, his pronouncement carried added weight and influence.

It is Aristotle who may justly be considered to have made the intellectual distinctions between humans and other animal species a central tenet of his zoological doctrine, without, however, drawing ethical distinctions between the species on the basis of any differences in mental endowments. It has often been remarked that Aristotle draws a more categorical distinction between the species in his ethical and political treatises than in his zoological treatises, where he appears to present a somewhat more generous construction of the intellectual faculties of nonhuman animals.[12] In the *Politica*, for example, Aristotle

[11] Theophrastus, *De sensu* 25, *Ἀλκμαίων μὲν πρῶτον ἀφορίζει τὴν πρὸς τὰ ζῷα διαφοράν. ἄνθρωπον γάρ φησι τῶν ἄλλων διαφέρειν ὅτι μόνος ξυνίησι, τὰ δ' ἄλλα αἰσθάνεται μέν, οὐ ξυνίησι δέ.* "Alcmaeon first delineates the difference between man and the other animals, for he says that man alone understands, but the other animals perceive but do not understand." All translations from Greek and Latin texts in this study are my own.

[12] The authorship of *Historia animalium* VII-X remains controversial, with Theophrastus as the favored candidate for author. A Theophrastean authorship might account for the generally more "animal friendly" attitude toward the intellectual and emotional capacities of non-human animals in evidence in those books than elsewhere in Aristotle's biological works. In these latter books of the *Historia animalium*, more developed cognitive and emotional capacities are attributed to non-human animals than tends to be the case in the earlier books of the treatise and in Aristotle's other biological works. A judicious presentation of arguments concerning the provenance of these books of the *Historia animalium* is found in Balme's Introduction to D. M. Balme and Allan Gotthelf, eds.,

declares that other species live "primarily by nature," but "man lives by reason as well, for he alone has reason."[13] In the *Metaphysica*, he makes a very similar observation that, while all animals have by nature the power of "sensation' (*αἴσθησις*), and while all animals live by their "impressions" (*φαντασίαις*) and "memories" (*μνήμαις*), humans beings live also by "skill and reasonings" (*τέχνῃ καὶ λογισμοῖς*).[14] The collective memories of humans lead them to learning and advancement. In *Historia animalium*, however, Aristotle allows non-human animals a faculty that he terms "comprehension" (*σύνεσις*), and he goes so far as to suggest that the intellectual faculties of all animals stand in a "more or less" relation from one animal to another (*Historia animalium* 486b15-16). It is interesting to note that, while Aristotle draws in some cases rather firm distinctions between the intellectual capacities of humans vis-à-vis those of other animals, he stops short of concluding that humans are "better" than other animals in possessing in consequence of their superior mental endowments a moral status that other species cannot claim. Philosopher Richard Sorabji is certainly correct in his observation, "Aristotle, I believe, was driven almost entirely by scientific interest in reaching his decision that animals lack reason."[15]

The Stoics incorporated Aristotelian zoology into an ethical system that features what may justly be viewed as an ancient articulation of "human exceptionalism," in which natural science and moral theory

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Aristotle: History of Animals Books VII-X (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 1-30. Balme argues for the Aristotelian authorship of these four books.

[13] Aristotle, *Politica* 1332b3-6, *τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα τῶν ζῴων μάλιστα μὲν τῇ φύσει ζῇ… ἄνθρωπος δὲ καὶ λόγῳ, μόνον γὰρ ἔχει λόγον.* "Now the other animals live primarily be nature . . . but man [lives] by reason as well, for he alone has reason."

[14] Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 980b26-28, *τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα ταῖς φαντασίαις ζῇ καὶ ταῖς μνήμαις, ἐμπειρίαις δὲ μέτεχει μικρόν. τὸ δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος καὶ τέχνῃ καὶ λογισμοῖς.* "Now the other animals live by impressions and memories, and have a little bit of experience, but the human race [lives] by skill and reasonings."

[15] Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 2.

are inextricably linked. For the Stoics, natural science served primarily to underpin their ethical system, the centerpiece of which was the complex and much-debated doctrine termed *οἰκείωσις*.[16] The Greek term resists translation. It has been variously rendered as "affiliation," "bonding," "association," "belonging," "affinity," and "familiarization," among other terms. Although the concept has been most consistently associated with the Stoics and reckoned to be fundamental to their concept of human-non-human animal relations, some scholars feel that the concept was first articulated by Theophrastus, whose treatises on animals are unfortunately lost. In the Stoic understanding of the doctrine, the "first impulse" (*πρώτη ὁρμή*) of every living creature is toward self-preservation, which, with the passage of time, leads it to feel a natural attraction to others of its own kind. In his life of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, Diogenes Laertius gives a clear description of the Stoic conception of the operation of this natural sense of self-identification inherent in every animal (*Vitae philosophorum* VII. 85), "An animal's first impulse, they say, is toward self-preservation, because from the outset nature feels affinity to itself . . . . For it is not reasonable that nature should alienate a creature from itself . . . .We are left to conclude

[16] Bibliography on this complex and controversial concept is extensive. A classic study of the concept is S. G. Pembroke, "Oikeiōsis," in A. A. Long, *Problems in Stoicism* (London: Athlone, 1971), pp. 114-149. Pembroke, p. 114, calls the concept "a central idea in Stoic thinking from the start." Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties and Fate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 154, notes that, although the concept is most closely identified with Stoicism, it may have figured as well in the thought of Theophrastus. See also Gisela Striker, "The Role of Oikeiōsis in Stoic Ethics," *OSAPh* 1 (1983), pp. 145-167; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis: Moral Development and Social Interaction in Early Stoic Philosophy* (Aarhus: University of Aarhus Press, 1990); and Gretchen Reydam-Schils, "Human Bonding and Oikeiōsis in Roman Stoicism," *OSAPh* 22 (2002), pp. 221-251.

therefrom that, in making a creature, nature formed it to have affinity with itself."[17]

According to Stoic teaching, human beings, as human beings, develop a natural concern and mutual affinity for each other. We naturally move beyond our self-interested state at birth and reach out to others of our own kind as we recognize in them fellow participants in the community of human beings. The later Stoic Hierocles, writing in the second century CE, likened this eventual recognition of community with other human beings to the formation of concentric circles in a pond that reach out ever wider on the surface of the water.[18] Likewise, non-human animals in time feel this attraction toward other animal species, and while humans feel attraction toward other human beings, the bond of *οἰκείωσις* can never exist between humans and other animals because of the nature of the animal soul. According to the Stoic Chrysippus, all animals have an eight-part soul, consisting of the five senses, the faculty of utterance, the faculty of reproduction, and an eighth part called the *ἡγεμονικόν*a sort of "guiding or governing principle."[19] Although all animals have this "governing principle," in the case of human beings it becomes rational in time, while it remains irrational in the case of other animals.

The lack of kinship between humans and other species arising from the absence of a rational faculty in non-humans is profound and permanent, and helps to account for the Stoic conviction that humans are not only *different* from other species, but *better*. In Cicero's dialogue *De*

[17] Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* VII. 85, *τὴν δὲ πρώτην ὁρμὴν φασι τὸ ζῷον ἴσχειν ἐπὶ τό τηρεῖν ἑαυτό, οἰκειούσης αὐτῷ τῆς φύσεως ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς… οὔτε γὰρ ἀλλοτριῶσαι εἰκὸς ἦν αὐτὸ (αὐτῷ) τὸ ζῷον … ἀπολείπεται τοίνυν λέγειν συστησαμένην αὐτὸ οἰκειῶσαι πρὸς ἑαυτό.*

[18] See Stobaeus, *Eclogai* 4. 671.

[19] Aetius, *Placita* IV. 4. 4. (= *SVF* II. 827), *οἱ Στοϊκοὶ ἐξ ὀκτὼ μέρων φασι συνεστάναι (την ψυχήν) πέντε τῶν αἰσθητικῶν … ἑκτοῦ φωνητικοῦ, ἑβδόμου δὲ σπερματικοῦ, ὀγδόου δὲ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ, ἀφ᾽ οὗ πάντα ἐπιτέταται.* "The Stoics say that [the soul] is made up of eight parts, five parts of the senses . . . , the sixth of utterance, the seventh of reproduction, and the eighth of the governing principle itself, by which these are all regulated."

finibus bonorum et malorum, the interlocutor Cato articulates the Stoic position forcefully in his observation, "But in the same way as they think that there exist the bonds of right between men and men, so do they feel that there is no bond of right with the beasts. For Chrysippus has well observed that other things were born forthe sake of men and gods, while men and gods exist for their own society and fellowship, so that men may use beasts for their own advantage without injustice."[20] In his treatise *De officiis,* Cicero specifically makes the Stoic connection between reason-possession and moral standing when he observes, "In no respect are we further removed from the beasts, in which we often say that there is courage…, but we do not say that there is in them justice, equity or goodness, for they are without reason and speech."[21] We see here, in Cicero's articulation of the Stoic tenet, that "man alone of animals" is rational and has no moral obligations toward non-rational species, a striking anticipation of the definitions of "human exceptionalism" formulated by Steiner and Machan cited above.

It is surprising that Renehan, who analyses Greek claims of the "man alone of animals" type so thoroughly in the case of the intellectual dimensions of non-human animals, almost completely omits discussion of Aristotelian and Stoic strictures on the emotional capacities of nonhumans since both taught that emotions or "passions" (πάθη) entail a cognitive component that enables an individual to give assent to the promptings of an emotion, an operation that would seem to be limited to "man alone of animals," if indeed non-humans are devoid of reason. In his treatise *Rhetorica,* Aristotle defines emotions as those feelings that

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[20] Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum* III. 67, *sed quomodo hominum inter homines iuris esse vincula putent, sic homini nihil iuris esse cum bestiis. praeclare enim Chrysippus cetera nata esse hominum causa et deorum, eos autem communitatis et sociatatis suae, ut bestiis, ut bestiis homines uti ad utilitatem suam possint sine iniuria.*

[21] Cicero, *De officiis* I. 50, *neque ulla re longius absumus a natura ferarum, in quibus inesse fortitudinem saepe dicimus. . . , iustitiam, aequitatem, bonitatem non dicimus; sunt enim rationis et orationis expertes.*

cause a person to change his opinions concerning his judgments (*κρίσεις*) and that are accompanied by pleasure or pain.[22] According to this view, an individual must recognize that he has been insulted, injured, or otherwise moved, before an emotion is triggered. The founder of the Stoic school, Zeno, taught that every emotion involves a contraction or movement of the soul that follows upon a judgment that something is or is not true: for example, fear follows a judgment that danger is imminent. The Stoics also maintained that rational assent (*συγκατάθεσις*) is a prerequisite for emotional response since one must accept or reject one's impressions. It was clear to the Stoics that non-human animals could not experience true emotions since they are irrational. Moreover, since they cannot give assent to their reactions to the situations that confront them, they cannot be praised or blamed for their actions, and they fall outside the purview of human moral consideration. The Stoic-Aristotelian dichotomy between human and non-human intellectual capacities did not go unquestioned in antiquity. Plutarch, in his treatise *De sollertia animalium*, argued that the intellectual properties of human and non-human species do not exist in an "all or nothing" relation, but should be viewed rather in a "more or less" relation.[23] Significantly, in his treatise *De esu carnium,* a plea for vegetarianism, Plutarch anticipates the very modern argument that moral status may not after all be inextricably linked to intellectual capacity. When he laments that farm animals intended for slaughter are deprived of the light of day and length of life which nature intended for them,[24] he foreshadows the sort of arguments employed, for example, by animal rights philosophers Peter Singer and Tom Regan, who maintain that an animal's moral standing is not linked

[22] Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1378a20-22, *ἔστι δὲ τὰ πάθη δι' ὅσα μεταβάλλοντες διαφέρουσι πρὸς τὰς κρίσεις, οἷς ἕπεται λύπη καὶ ἡδονή.*

[23] Plutarch, *De sollertia animalium* 963A, *τοῦ φρονεῖν δύναμις ἄλλοις δ' ἄλλως κατὰ τὸ μᾶλλον καὶ ἧττον παροῦσα τὰς ὁρωμένας διαφορὰς πεποίηκεν.* "The differences that we observe arise from the greater or lesser degree of understanding, of one sort in one creature and of another sort in another."

[24] Plutarch, *De esu carnium* 994A, *σαρκιδίου μικροῦ χάριν ἀφαιρούμεθα ψυχῆς ἥλιον, φῶς, τὸν τοῦ βίου χρόνον, ἐν ᾧ γέγονε καὶ πέφυκεν.*

to its intellectual faculties but rests instead on such factors as its capacity to take an interest in its own life and to enjoy that life, or on its capacity to suffer. What is remarkable, however, is the degree to which the Stoic position that the presence or absence of a developed rational faculty determines moral worth found favor in post-classical thought on animals and continues to find its defenders in proponents of the concept of "human exceptionalism."

The sorts of atrocities that Plutarch decried from his vantage point in the early Roman Empire, and a host of others that he could scarcely have envisioned, have been to some degree addressed and at times even remedied through the efforts of animal rights philosophers like Singer and Regan and the generation of thinkers who followed them, as well as through the more visible, less theoretical, and sometimes more confrontational activities of animal advocacy groups. In the United States, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), has by far the highest profile among such advocacy groups and the most ardent supporters and detractors.[25] PETA deserves special mention in a study of the concept of "human exceptionalism" in the twenty first century because its philosophical and activist agendas are laser-focused on eradicating the very sorts of atrocities against non-human animals that arise from acceptance of the assumptions of "human exceptionalism" as it manifests itself today. As such, the organization has come under attack for what one writer has labeled its deliberate attempt to undermine what he considers the prerogatives that history and common sense guarantee to rational human beings, whose very lives are, in his view, the illustration and validation of the claims of "human exceptionalism." In his book *A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy*, American attorney and bioethicist and Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center on Human Exceptionalism, Wesley J. Smith, lashed out at PETA for what he calls the organization's attempt to "knock human beings off the

[25] On PETA's stance on human moral ethical obligations toward non-human animals, see note 2 above.

pedestal of moral distinctiveness."[26] Whether human beings capitulate in this struggle is, for Smith, "the great philosophical question of the twenty-first century,"[27] in light of which Smith promises to "mount an unequivocal defense of the belief that human beings stand uniquely at the pinnacle of moral worth, a concept sometimes called 'human exceptionalism.'"[28]

The mission statement of Smith's Discovery Institute states that it seeks to uphold human dignity and uniqueness by revitalizing a commitment to the sort of human rights and duties embodied in the concept "human exceptionalism." Simply put, the Institute seeks, according to its mission statement, to educate the public through "an intellectual defense of the importance of being human." Not surprisingly, this endeavor views any and all attempts to advocate for any consideration for the potential interests of non-human animals to be not merely frivolous and laughable but pernicious and dangerous.[29] Although Smith betrays no familiarity with earlier philosophical speculation on his topic and never mentions classical authors, individuals

[26] Wesley J. Smith, *A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy: The Human Cost of the Animal Rights Movement* (New York: Encounter Books, 2010), p. 8. Smith, p. 3, explains that the striking title of his book is derived from an assertion by Ingrid Newkirk, President of PETA, that the animals listed, all mammals, are or equal moral value: a rat is morally equivalent to a human being.

[27] Smith, p. 8.

[28] Smith, p. 3. Some defenders of anthropocentrism defend their stance by attempting to distance human beings from their primate relatives. See, for example, Jeremy Taylor, *Not a Chimp: The Hunt to Find the Genes that Make Us Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Helene Guldberg, *Just Another Ape?* (Charlottesville: Societas, 2010).

[29] Smith's overheated rhetoric is not directed solely against what he perceives to be the unwarranted attack upon the prerogatives of human beings by animal advocates of various sorts. In *The War on Humans* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2014), he similarly attacks the environmental movement for being, in his view, deeply anti-human. He argues that the natural world has no intrinsic rights, and that arguments that supply evidence of the effects of global warming are hysterical examples of human self-loathing.

familiar with Greek pronouncements on the special excellences of human beings will feel a strong sense of familiarity with the tenor of his statements. Smith's assertion that man occupies his lofty position in the hierarchy of animal creation rests primarily on an assertion of man's vastly superior intellectual endowments: human nature, as Smith expresses it, is rational nature. Moreover, he states that man's unique rationality has moral consequences for human conduct: only humans, Smith asserts, possess moral agency and can be praised or blamed for their actions. Smith emerges here as a sort of Neo-Stoic in his identification of intellect with moral value. In contrast to his classical antecedents, however, Smith, somewhat ironically, views human exceptionalism not only as a guarantor of advantage but as a source of responsibilities and duties toward other species that are incumbent upon human beings. It is humans who must decide what rights other species may have, and humans are obligated to avoid wanton cruelty toward other animals, at least, as he qualifies his position, within reason. It is undeniable, he admits, that most farm animals live in unnatural and unpleasant conditions, but in Smith's view, such considerations miss the mark because only human beings possess the cognitive apparatus that makes it possible for their lives to matter to them. In the final analysis, considerations of potential animal distress, are, in Smith's view, trivial because, after all, only the human being "thinks abstractly, communicates in language, envisions and fabricates machinery, improves life through science and engineering, or explores the deeper truths found in philosophy and religion."[30]

The primacy of reason as a valid criterion for according moral standing to humans and denying it to other species has been called into question in recent decades, both by philosophers and by cognitive ethologists, those biologists who specialize in the study of the intellectual faculties of non-human animal behavior.[31] Some biologists

[30] Smith, p. 238.

[31] Biologist and animal behavioral ethologist Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (Novato: New World Library, 2007), p. 30, defines cognitive

argue that the similar brain structures and neurochemicals common to the brain activities of humans and some higher primates make it likely that differences in intellectual faculties and even emotional responses are a matter of degree rather than of kind. This view figures prominently in the argument for the presence of emotions in non-human animals advanced by biologist Marc Bekoff, who notes that it can be traced already to Darwin, who argued, in his work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, published in 1872, that humans and other animal species employ similar facial muscles, vocalizations and bodily movements to indicate the presence of such emotions as fear, anger and grief, so that emotions form a continuum from nonhuman species to human beings. Differences between the emotions between species are therefore ones of degree rather than of kind.[32] Another line of argument holds that emphasis on the primacy of reason as the guarantor of moral standing is questionable since not all humans possess full rational faculties, while certain animal species appear to possess rational faculties that surpass those of at least some humans. Applying the so-called Argument from Marginal Cases, advocates of this position argue that one cannot justly deny rights to some non-human species that one would not hesitate to accord to those "marginal" human beings with limited rational capacities.[33] Defenders of "human exceptionalism" maintain that such arguments rely on a blurring of distinctions between the mental capacities of animal species, and they attack them on the grounds that they rely excessively on naïve anthropomorphization and unprovable

ethology as the "comparative, evolutionary, and ecological study of animal minds." This study, he notes, entails examination of animal emotions, beliefs, reasoning, information processing, consciousness and self-awareness, all studied preferably in the animals' natural environment (that is, "in the wild"), rather than in the artificial conditions of the scientific laboratory.

[32] Bekoff, pp. 31-37.

[33] A detailed examination of the philosophical stance termed the Argument from Marginal Cases is found in Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Babies and Beasts: The Argument from Marginal Cases* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997)

anecdote. To dwell constantly on the intellectual similarities of humans to other primates, they argue, tempts us to forget uniquely human traits like self-awareness, language use, autonomy and a sense of justice, to name but a few human attainments that have been listed in similar catalogues since the time of the Stoics. Noteworthy here is the unquestioning acceptance of the Stoic view that moral status is predicated on the possession of a rational faculty, and that claims of "human exceptionalism" must be defended from this vantage point. Some proponents of "human exceptionalism" see our intellectual superiority to other species as operating ultimately in the best interests of other animals, and as illustrating, ironically, a kinder, gentler side that other animals cannot show. Vegetarianism, for example, is viewed in this light as a demonstration of a kind of benevolent paternalism, since only humans can make the moral decision to abstain from the cycle of predation from which intellectually inferior species cannot tear themselves.[34] Since proponents of "human exceptionalism" can countenance the view that other species lack the intellectual sophistication to live the sorts of lives that can matter to them, the question of the emotional states of animals would seem to be of considerable importance, if emotions reflect a being's reactions to and evaluations of its surroundings. The classical stance on emotions in non-human species was rather straightforward and unified across schools: since emotions were viewed as cognitively-based, requiring such capacities as judgment, choice and assent, Greek philosophical schools denied that irrational non-human species were capable of true emotions. Some modern biologists, in the manner of the Stoics, stress the cognitive element of emotions in their own theories of animal emotions. Biologist

[34] This patronizing attitude toward non-human animals is reflected in the comment of Smith, *A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy* 240, "In fact, it is our humanity, *and only our humanity* [Smith's emphasis], that permits us to recognize and care that — Descartes notwithstanding — 'animals are not stones; they feel.'" This human kindliness is what prompts us, in Smith's view, to slay our food animals humanely.

Marc D. Hauser is willing to attribute fear and anger to non-humans, but he rejects the idea that other species can demonstrate emotions that, in his view, would depend critically on a sense of self and of others, and that require a moral compass that can distinguish right from wrong, emotions of a sort that Hauser labels "normative," like grief and shame.[35]

Ethologists who support the position that non-human animals may be capable of some emotions that are more complicated than anger and aggression still find themselves defending their positions against charges of blatant anthropomorphization and reliance on anecdote and common sense, the sorts of evidence that some of their opponents call "stories." One must admit that this situation is not likely to change dramatically until other species learn human languages and enlighten us directly, but some ethologists stress that their case, while tentative and reliant on anthropomorphizing anecdote, is bolstered by evidence from neuroscience that human and non-human animals release similar neurochemicals when under the influence of what would be viewed as emotional states. Biologist Marc Bekoff, for example, maintains that some species are capable of grief, joy, love and shame, the sort of emotions that Hauser had termed "normative" in that they presuppose the capacity in one individual to evaluate the emotional state of another individual. The answer to the question of whether other species inhabit an emotional universe, especially one so sophisticated and complex as that posited by Bekoff, has practical implications for the behavior of humans that are as enormous as those involved in the question of the intellectual capacities of non-human species, for if it can be proved that animals are beings whose emotional lives *matter* to them, human beings might feel compelled to rethink the morality of their treatment of other species. Emotional animals might fall within the sphere of human moral concern if, as in the case of humans, the experiences of their lives render them joyful or sorrowful. Perhaps it is a suspicion that this may after all be true that inspires the heated rhetoric of defenders of "human exceptionalism" who, like Wesley J. Smith, warn of the dangers to

[35] Marc D. Hauser, *Wild Minds: What Animals Really Think* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), p. 213.

human civilization involved in according standing to non-human animals and thereby knocking human beings off their pedestal. Biologists eager to prove a continuum of emotional experience between species have a hard road to travel, since anecdotal evidence, which researchers including Bekoff embrace enthusiastically as supportive of their thesis that other species lead satisfying and complex emotional lives,[36] still faces skepticism and ridicule from other ethologists who point out, for example, the tendency of some researchers to assume that a given emotion will manifest itself in the same manner in humans and in non-human animals, that a particular action has the same meaning and value when performed by a human and by a non-human animal, and that it is inspired by similar emotional promptings. Even Bekoff is willing to admit that the fact that wolves can live together in peace or that dolphins can rescue floundering humans may not after all signal the existence in those animals of any moral code. Bekoff touches here on the very knotty problem of moral agency in non-human animals, a topic that exercised the Greeks as well. Can we be sure that the wolves and dolphins, in their apparently benevolent actions, intend to act morally? Already Aristotle had articulated the view (*Ethica Nicomachea* 1105a27-35) that an individual can be virtuous only if he knows that he is acting for virtuous reasons and has chosen to do so. For Greek ethics, as for champions of modern "human exceptionalism," such a possibility is simply beyond the pale. In his work, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are*, Dutch-American primatologist Frans deWaal, whose lifework has focused on studying similarities in human and non-human biology and behavior, calls attention to the current impasse that we have outlined, between champions of "human exceptionalism" and advocates of a more inclusive view of animal creation that places "man among animals" above the "man alone of animals" model which, like the Trojan Horse, is a "gift" of the Greeks. deWaal observes, "The same tension between continuity and exceptionalism persists today, with claim after claim about how we differ, followed by the subsequent erosion of such

[36] Bekoff, pp. 121-122.

claims."[37] An interesting, if somewhat deflating solution to this dilemma was offered by ardent Darwinist James Rachels, who argues that evolutionary theory does not support the idea of "human dignity," and that human life should be "devalued." He observes, " . . . Darwinism leads inevitably to the abandonment of the idea of human dignity and the substitution of a different sort of ethic . . . ."[38] This, in his view, is an ethic in which species membership is irrelevant and the welfare of all beings is equally important. Rachels' suggestion has found favor with some ethical philosophers and animal rights advocates who likewise question the ancient assumption that being human, and therefore being endowed with reason, is paramount. In the final analysis, it might be an overreach to claim that Stoic strictures on the intellectual and emotional capacities of other species directly *influenced* modern views on these issues. Although Stoicism became a sort of unofficial philosophy of the Roman Empire, and in turn found favor with the Church, it would be difficult to pinpoint the degree to which Stoic teaching exercised any direct influence on specific aspects of subsequent thought on the morality of human treatment of non-human animals. It would be equally rash to assert that more animal-friendly authors like Plutarch and Porphyry exercised any humanizing influence on post-classical treatment of other animal species. It is certainly correct, however, to view the survival of ancient manifestations of "human exceptionalist" notions as an illustration of the operation of similar prejudices against other animals arising from a recognition of the practicalities of life. The Stoics and modern proponents of "human exceptionalism" both maintain, perhaps not without some feelings of guilt, that human life depends heavily upon the exploitation of other animals. Wesley J. Smith believes that if human beings avoid completely the use of other animals, human dignity will inevitably be compromised. Practically speaking, Smith argues that, if we do not eat, wear and dismember animals in medical research and the

[37] Frans deWaal, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (New York and London: Norton, 2016), pp. 125-126.

[38] James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 171.

production of perfumes and deodorant, human life will become impossible. Precisely this claim, without reference to perfume or deodorant, was made by the Stoics. In his treatise *De sollertia animalium*, Plutarch, in discussing the Stoic concept of justice, articulated their position, "It is either necessary that injustice arise among us if we pay no heed to them, or that, if we do not make use of them, life is impossible and unmanageable."[39] Ironically, "human exceptionalism" emerges here, in both its ancient and its modern incarnation, as a kind of embarrassed acknowledgment of human limitations.

The sorts of atrocities committed against non-human animals that Stoic ethics countenanced continue on a monumental scale worldwide. Yet there is reason for hope, since some animal advocates in the present century have asked a question that seems not to have occurred to the Stoics or indeed to other ancient thinkers, with the possible exception of Plutarch and Porphyry: why does it matter, they ask, if human beings do have vastly superior intellectual faculties, and what real connection is there, after all, between reason and moral standing? Some philosophers and ethologists, as we noted above, now ask rather if an animal's capacity to suffer, to enjoy, and to take an interest in its own life eclipses the capacity to reason as a criterion for inclusion in the community of moral beings. If this is so, perhaps the ever widening circles of inclusion that the Stoics envisioned, in their doctrine of *oikeiōsis*, as reaching out from one human being to the next, may finally reach out to our other animal brethren as well.

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[39] Plutarch, *De sollertia animalium* 964A, *γίνεται γὰρ ἢ τὸ ἀδικεῖν ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν ἀφείδουσιν αὐτῶν, ἢ μὴ χρωμένοις τὸ ζῆν ἀδύνατον καὶ ἄπορον.*

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„LJUDSKA IZUZETNOST“: GRČKI IZVORI JEDNOG MODERNOG POJMA I NJEGOVE POSLEDICE PO ŽIVOTE ŽIVOTINJA

Sažetak: Moderno filozofsko učenje što se obično naziva „ljudskom izuzetnošću“, a koje smatra da ljudska bića, zbog uočene intelektualne nadmoći u odnosu na druge životinjske vrste, imaju moralnu vrednost koja se ne može pripisati drugim vrstama i koja ljudima daje pravo da druge životinje upotrebljavaju radi svojih potreba, svoje filozofske korene ima u grčkoj filozofiji, i to naročito u Aristotelovim delima i u stoičkom učenju o *oikeiōsis*-u, koje drži da ljudska bića jesu u srodstvu s drugim ljudima, ali ne s drugim vrstama inferiornih intelektualnih obdarenosti. Učenje o „ljudskoj izuzetnosti“ u XXI veku koristi se za opravdavanje velikog klanja ne-ljudskih životinja širom sveta radi hrane, odeće, medicinskih svrha i zabave. Tvrdnjama o „ljudskoj izuzetnosti“ danas se suprotstavljaju filozofi životinjskih prava i različiti tipovi boraca za blagostanje životinja koji tvrde ili da ne-ljudske vrste imaju dovoljan stepen umnosti koji bi omogućio da budu uključene u sferu ljudske moralne brige, ili da posedovanje uma samo po sebi jeste beznačajan kriterijum za moralno razmatranje, te da patnja životinja mora biti uzeta u obzir u ljudskim interakcijama s drugim životinjskim vrstama.

Ključne reči: ljudska izuzetnost, specizam, antropocentrizam, stoicizam, *oikeiōsis*, kognitivna etologija, srodstvo

Primljeno: 23.3.2022.
Prihvaćeno: 28.5.2022.