

# CONSERVATION BIOLOGY VERSUS COMPASSIONATE BIOLOGY

DAVID PEARCE



## ABSTRACT

Since the Cambrian explosion, pain and suffering have been inseparable from the existence of life on Earth. However, a major evolutionary transition is now in prospect. One species of social primate has evolved the capacity to master biotechnology, rewrite its own genetic source code, and abolish the molecular signature of experience below “hedonic zero” throughout the living world. This talk explores one aspect of the evolutionary transition ahead, namely interventions to phase out the cruelties of Nature. The exponential growth of computer processing power promises to let us micro-manage every cubic metre of the planet. Responsible stewardship of tomorrow’s wildlife parks will entail cross-species fertility regulation via immunocontraception, “reprogramming” predators, famine relief, healthcare provision, and eventually a pan-species analogue of the welfare state. Can science and technology engineer the well-being of all sentience in our forward light-cone?

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**“We have enslaved the rest of the animal creation, and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feathers so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form.”**

(William Ralph Inge, "The Idea of Progress" (Romanes Lecture, 27 May 1920), reprinted in *Outspoken Essays: Second Series* (1922))

**21st century biotechnology confers on human beings God-like powers over Nature.**

**What principles should govern our stewardship of the living world?**

**When are we ethically entitled to harm another sentient being?**

**When are we ethically entitled to allow another sentient being to come to harm through neglect?**

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## Priorities



- Does Non-Human Animal Suffering Matter?**
- Do Non-Human Animals Suffer As Much As Humans?**
- Can Human Animals Help Non-Human Animals?**

**PROPOSAL:** non-human animals with central nervous systems are functionally *and* ethically akin to human infants and prelinguistic toddlers.

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## What is Moral Dumbfounding?

Ref: Jonathan Haidt, The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment. *Psychological Review* 108.4 (2001): 814-834.

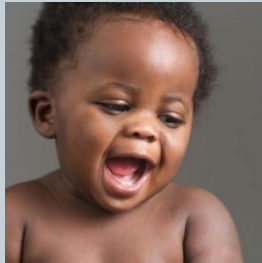


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## The Anti-Speciesist Revolution

What is Speciesism?



The ethical anti-speciesist argues beings of equal sentience deserve equal weight irrespective of species membership *not* members of different species deserve equal weight.

Objection: But what about POTENTIAL?

Response: We value human babies and prelinguistic toddlers for who they are, not for the mature adult they may - or may not - eventually become (*cf.* the love, care and medical support we accord a human toddler with a progressive disorder who will never live to celebrate her third birthday.)



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## ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

A Cruelty-free Vegan Lifestyle For Human and Non-Human Animals

### Should We Intervene?

Is there a fundamental difference between ethical intervention to help a human being and “sentimental” pleas to “interfere” with Nature and help a non-human animal?

### Reframing The Question.

Humans already massively intervene in Nature.

(“rewilding”, habitat destruction, captive breeding programs for big cats, etc.)

What ethical principle(s) should govern our interventions?

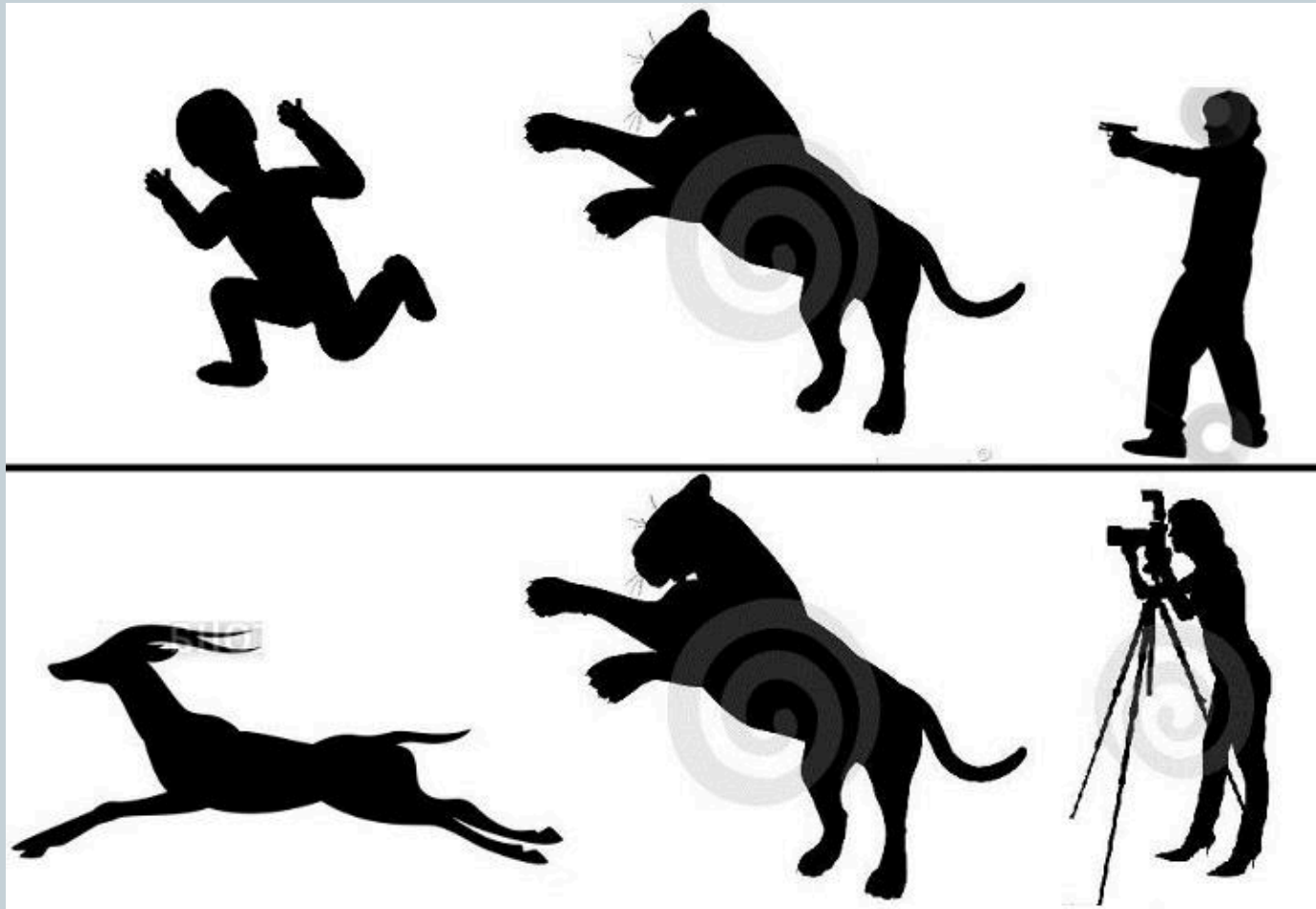
What is Status Quo Bias?

What is the Naturalistic Fallacy?

Does suffering matter only when we happen to stumble across it?



WHY?





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## It Must Be So?

*“The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute that it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive, others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear, others are being slowly devoured from within by rasping parasites, thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst and disease. It must be so.”*

Richard Dawkins  
River Out of Eden (1995)

Is Dawkins right?  
Will intervention do more harm than good?



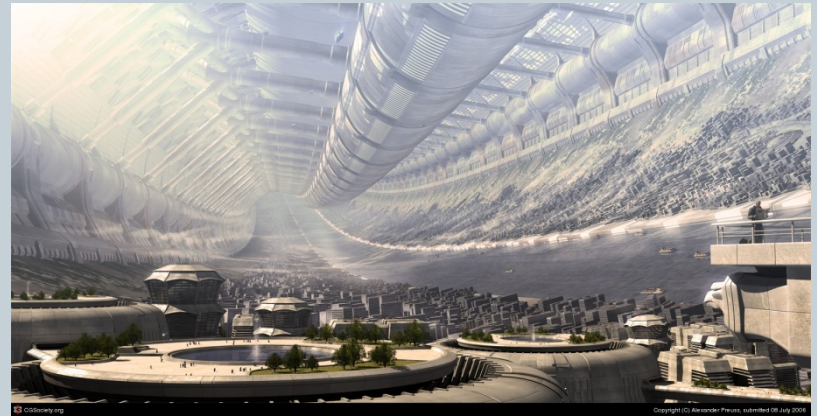


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## Utopian Technologies

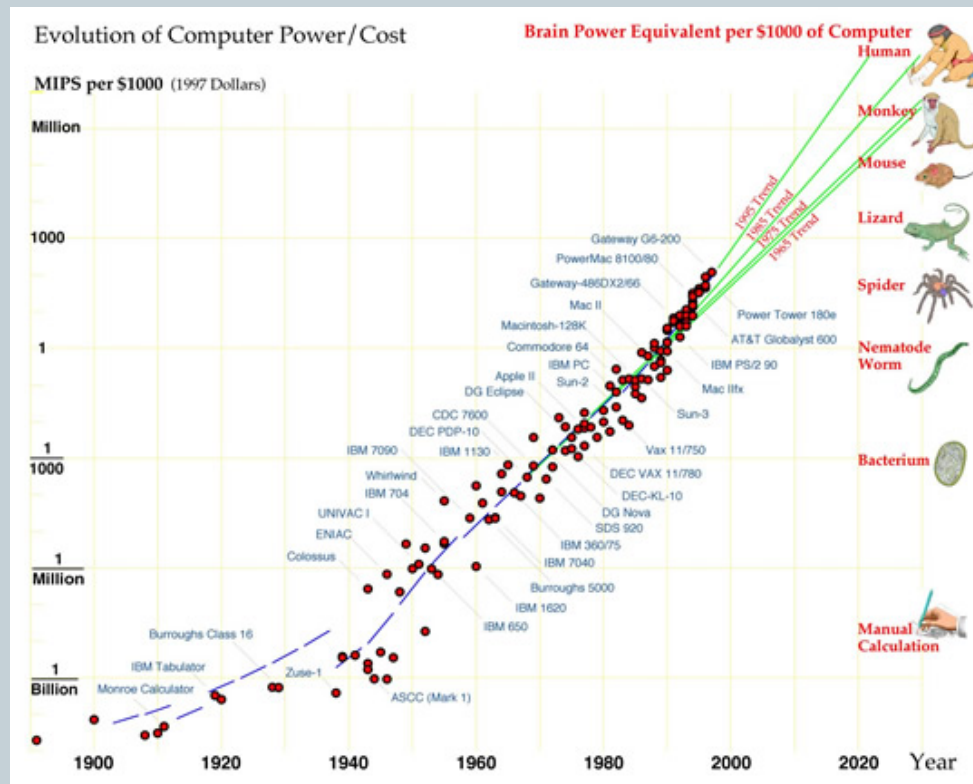
- Cross-species fertility control (immunocontraception, sterilants).
- Neurochips .
- GPS tracking.
- *In vitro* meat for obligate carnivores.
- Genetic engineering, e.g. “reprogramming predators”.
- Nanorobotics.
- Global surveillance and computational micromanagement of every cubic metre of the planet (*cf.* the exponential growth of computer processing power: Moore's law).



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## The Intelligence Explosion What Is Full-Spectrum Superintelligence?



<http://www.biointelligence-explosion.com>

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## Ethics: what matters?

Do species matter? Do genera (families, orders, classes, phyla, etc) matter?  
Do ecosystems matter?

OR

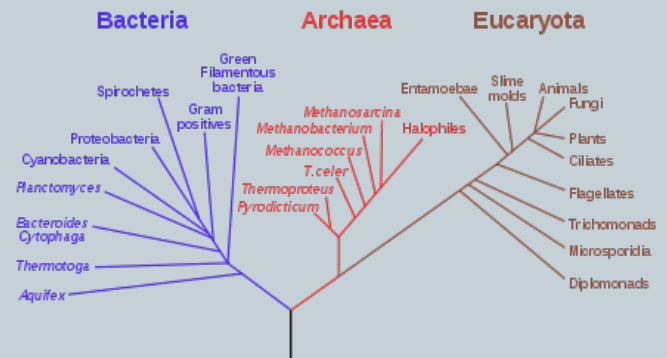
Do only individual *subjects of experience* matter?

QUESTION.

Does the pain-pleasure axis disclose the world's inbuilt metric of (dis)value?

What would an impartial 'God's-eye-view' of all possible first-person perspectives entail?

Phylogenetic Tree of Life



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## **Conservationist Objection** to Compassionate Biology:

Is a behaviourally modified lion truly a lion?

Is a behaviourally modified human still a human?

What is *species essentialism*?



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## Compassionate Biology.

Case Study: African Elephants  
(*Loxodonta africana* & *Loxodonta cyclotis*)

- immunocontraception.
- preimplantation genetic screening.
- obstetric and neonatal support.
- neurochipping and GPS tracking of c. 500,000 free-living elephant population to monitor health and nutritional status.
- veterinary care.
- psychiatric and behavioural support.
- orthodontics (primarily to replace terminal molars.

Otherwise healthy geriatric elephants today slowly starve to death when their sixth and final molars wear down. Elderly elephants can no longer adequately chew food. The malnourished elephant eventually collapses through inanition. S/he may then be eaten alive by predators. The potential upper bound to the lifespan of a dentally intact elephant is currently unknown.)

- **ANNUAL ESTIMATED COST:** comprehensive program of pan-African elephant healthcare 2-3 billion dollars (contemporary prices).





# The Future of Sentience

**Global Veganism  
A Pan-Species Welfare State?**



# Towards the well-being of all sentience.



“The question is not, “Can they reason?” nor, “Can they talk?”  
but rather, “Can they suffer?””  
(Jeremy Bentham)

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**THE END**