

Antispeciesisms

A Report on the *Antispeciesism in Discussion Conference*, Villa Mirafiori, Roma, Italy, June 11th, 2013

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The workshop entitled *Antispeciesism in Discussion* held in Rome on June 11th, 2013 was organized by Lav (the most important animal Italian advocacy group) in collaboration with Minding Animals Italy together with the academic journal *Animal Studies: Rivista Italiana di Antispecismo / Animal Studies: the Italian Antispeciesism Journal*. On that occasion four Italian scholars entered into discussion regarding four different aspects of antispeciesism, sustained and helped by four representatives from Lav. During the first two sessions held in the morning Leonardo Caffo (Labont, University of Turin, Italy), hosted by Ilaria Innocenti (Responsible for the dog and cat sector of Lav), spoke about *Philosophical Antispeciesism*, while Alma Massaro (University of Genoa, Italy), in dialogue with Ciro Troiano (Responsible for zoo mafia control in Lav), presented a dialogue on *Theological Antispeciesism*. In the afternoon Paola Sobbrío (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Piacenza, Italy), in dialogue with Carla Campanaro (Representative of the Lav legal department), presented *Juridical Antispeciesism*. The final session of the day was led by Marco Maurizi (University of Bergamo, Italy) and Matteo Gasparin (layer of Lav) who dealt with aspects of *Political Antispeciesism*. Despite the specific nature of the issues and personal views in question it is evident that the entire workshop provided the opportunity to reconsider antispeciesism as a unique movement which strives for the liberation of animals from contemporary human exploitation.

It is worth considering the subject of each session in brief.

PHILOSOPHICAL ANTISPECIESISM

In the opening session Leonardo Caffo presented his idea of the “Third Antispeciesism” or weak antispeciesism, based on the recognition of antispeciesism as a moral phenomenon which needs to be reevaluated from the basis of the hard reality of the suffering and death of animals. Rejecting all indirect arguments, he advocated the necessity of recognizing the specificity and unicity of the Animal Movement. The history of the Animal Movement, he stated, has led to a point where indirect arguments have no place as they are fallacious. Caffo urged, therefore, for people to recognize the moral implications of animal exploitation, without considering the usefulness of these misuses – a point, as we will see, also stressed by Sobbrío in her session.

THEOLOGICAL ANTISPECIESISM

In this panel Alma Massaro presented the contemporary debate of animal theology to the public. She emphasized how, stemming from a new reading of the Holy Scriptures, as proposed by authors such as Paolo De Benedetti, Lewis Regeinstein, Matthew Scully, and David Clough among others, it is possible to formulate a new Christian spirituality in which animals are seen as subjects – and not merely objects. This new dimension of Christian faith, she argued, will not only affect the life of every single believer but also affect their relationship with the whole of creation – animals included. Massaro pointed out the ancient dichotomy between spirit and matter and the consequent duality between spirit and body which does not originate from the Biblical text but from Greek philosophy.

JURIDICAL ANTISPECIESISM

In the afternoon Paola Sobbrío embarked on a discussion concerning the possibility of giving life to juridic antispeciesism. As she pointed out very clearly, the contemporary European legislation is far from being antispeciesist. Welfarism does not take into account animals as subjects having a life but rather is only concerned with the interests of humans beings – seen as both producers and consumers. The improvement of the so called “Animal Welfare” is based on the erroneous belief of the value of indirect argument (also rejected by Caffo): it presents animals as objects and not subjects with their own specificity and desires. Sobbrío argued, therefore, the necessity for structural changes, in an abolitionist perspective.

POLITICAL ANTISPECIESISM

In the closing session Marco Maurizi proposed the liberation of animals based on the analysis of the society structures. In contrast with Caffo's theory, he offered a paper on antispeciesism as a politic phenomenon in opposition to the current form of capitalist societies. Human behavior, he said, is not a result of biological determinism but rather is an effect of the social model of the human environment. Maurizi discussed and criticized the contemporary culture of exploitation. Exploitation is, he stated, at the root of political, social, and economic systems. Only by understanding these structures will reforms be possible. He proposed a reformation of the social model of the contemporary dominion. This dominion, he said, is directed not only against animals but towards human beings as well. For this reason he accepted the possibility of uniting the Animal Liberation movement with other reformation movements.

The sessions which were presented in the form of a dialogue, where each talk was introduced and discussed by a Lav representative, allowed a more profound debate into the specific topic despite the four quite different approaches presented. Eventually it emerged how contemporary antispeciesism consists, primarily, of looking at the present world in a new way. It can be seen as an innovative "change of paradigm", just as Copernicus' revolution was. In fact, it does not consist of attempting to change reality but rather of changing the way we look at it.