

6. Species of Dignity

No person or other creature is ever 100% internally consistent in their views, but it is an ideal worth striving for. Ted agreed with this, and therefore he faced the following issue. Ted firmly believed that speciesism was evil, but bears eat salmon. Eating another species certainly fits the basic definition of speciesism (doing things to another species that one would not or should not do to one's own species), and yet Ted had no intention of giving up eating salmon. This placed Ted in a position of *cognitive dissonance* (he did remember something from Psychology 101) that needed to be resolved.

The resolution was remarkably simple. Some species are Species of Dignity, also known as "dignified species," and some are not. Speciesism only arises if bad actions or attitudes are directed at *dignified* species. So, for example, it would be OK for Ted to eat a salmon, because salmon are not dignified, whereas it would not be OK for Ted to eat an elephant, because elephants are dignified. Similarly it would be OK to swat a fly or squash a mosquito, but not to shoot an eagle.

This type of distinction is made not only by Ted, but also (often only implicitly) by many people, including animal rights activists. For example, Greenpeace fights hard to try to prevent the hunting of whales, whereas no one seems concerned about sardines, menhaden or even cod. If they are concerned about sardines or menhaden or cod, the concern is not for the sardines' or the menhadens' or the cods' welfare, but rather that there won't be enough left for us to eat. (Or, in the case of menhaden, to turn into fish oil.) The people who oppose the killing of baby harp seals are, Ted suspects, quite capable of squashing a mosquito. The basic criterion seems to be that species are worthy

of respect and protection if they are cute, or more generally if they look or act like us, or we think it would be fun to look or act like them.

Of course, Ted did not accept the notion that dignity consisted of resembling humans. For example, bears are certainly dignified, and yet they don't look much like most people. So he set about codifying criteria for dignity, and classifying species into dignified and undignified. He was the world pioneer in this effort, but he toiled in obscurity for many years, until the landmark Supreme Court ruling (*Albert T.E. Bear vs. Delta Airlines*) that extended the coverage of the Americans with Disabilities Act to all *dignified* species. Without such a restriction to dignified species, absurd situations could have arisen, like a bull working in a china shop (a "reasonable accommodation" might have been to show only computer images of the china), or a moose in a lighting shop (hang the chandeliers higher), or a wolf as a shepherd (cross sheep with elephants to make them too big for a wolf to attack). So suddenly the classification of species as dignified or not became a matter of substantial legal and commercial importance, and Ted was in a position to cash in.

Ted's rules were both copyrighted and patented, and despite widespread infringements of his intellectual property rights, they made him a lot of money. Here they are.

(Ted's Rules ©)

1. *Humans are dignified.*

Actually, this rule was established largely for reasons of political correctness and profitability. Ted had some doubts about its accuracy. For example, he had lived in Australia for six months, and while the Australians were very friendly and nice, and

generally polite, “dignified” was in some doubt. Still, he did understand which species would be paying for his list.

2. Bears are dignified.

This rule requires no explanation.

3. Prey is not dignified.

If prey were dignified, it could not be eaten, and the food chain would be broken. So this rule is pretty much a biological necessity. However, Ted worried about the need for possible exceptions to this rule. For example, pigs are intelligent and they drop spoor only in one corner of their enclosure, if they are kept in an enclosure big enough to have multiple locations to consider dropping spoor in. Still, if you’re not at the top of the food chain, Ted decided, it’s hard to be considered dignified.

4. Species that deposit dung all over the place are not dignified.

Ted had once walked through a sheep paddock in New Zealand and so he understood the need for this rule. Also, it was a good way to make sure that dogs would not be considered dignified. Once again the need for possible exceptions arose. For example, elephants are not very careful about where they leave their droppings. Ted considered training teams of cats and sending them to Africa to teach elephants how to bury their solid wastes. This plan ran into serious logistical trouble, as well as suffering from the basic flaw that it is more or less impossible to train cats to do anything. So he decided that it was easier just to make a few exceptions, like elephants, eagles and whales. In the case of whales, of course, their poop does not drop – it just kind of floats away – so maybe an exception is not needed. (The careful reader will note that Ted was

trained properly and knows that the word “shit” is appropriate as an expletive but not as a noun or a verb.)

5. *Venomous creatures are not dignified.*

This rule applies to wasps, spiders, scorpions, many snakes, box jellyfish, and other odd creatures like the marbled cone snail and the poison dart frog. It is not considered controversial.

6. *Every continent must have at least one dignified non-human species.*

As with Rule 1, this rule was established mostly for reasons of political correctness. It caused Ted problems on only two continents, Antarctica and Australia. Ted solved the problem of Antarctica by deciding that Emperor Penguins are dignified. Australia was harder. Ted was willing to grant that human Australians are (mostly) dignified, but it was hard to find a non-human addition to the list. A surprising number of Australian species are venomous, and others have long tails and bounce from place to place. Ted considered the carpet python, a very big non-venomous snake that is well-liked by Australians because it eats the young of many venomous snakes, as well as rats, possums, bandicoots, bats, wallabies and birds. But he decided in the end that a dignified snake is not a convincing idea. Finally he settled on the salt-water crocodile, found in northern Queensland and the Northern Territories (think *Crocodile Dundee*), and the subject of many possibly accurate stories about vanishing dogs, livestock, people, and even small watercraft. Ted remembers well the drive that Piotr and Kristin took from Port Douglas to Cape Tribulation (which is, in Queensland, quite literally the end of the road), which included a crossing of the Daintree River by cable ferry. Piotr saw a crocodile in the river, but Kristin said it was only a log. (*Famous last words!*) The log

was going downstream and then turned toward the bank and climbed out of the water. This made Kristin understand why they let you swim at the Great Barrier Reef but not in the Daintree River.

Piotr suggested another rule: Species with boobs are dignified. However, Ted had been to a dairy farm in the Azores, and had also seen milk goats in Crete, and he rejected this stupid suggestion out of hand.

Ted is willing to create additional rules or exceptions for an additional fee, so long as they do not massively contradict the six basic rules above. For example, the Chief Beluga Sturgeon of the Caspian Sea, concerned about the possible extinction of his species by fishermen who wanted only the caviar, offered to give Ted's corporation ninety percent of the caviar, carefully extracted so as not to harm the sturgeon, in exchange for being classified as dignified, and therefore a protected species. This would have been in the interests of almost everyone, and Ted would have agreed to it in a minute, but the Beluga Constitution required ratification by a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority of the voting sturgeon, and three surviving sturgeon could not be found to vote in favor. Whether two yes votes out of two constitutes a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority, or whether such an agreement would violate female sturgeons' reproductive rights, were constitutional questions that should have been settled in their court system, but there were no surviving judges. In the end no agreement was reached.