

# TIER - AUTONOMIE

Jahrgang 12, Nr. 2

ISSN 2363-6513

April 2026

---

Gruppe Messel Tierrechtsarchiv > Sociology, Animal Sociology, Human Rights:

## Syl Ko: Why look at animals (when humans do not want to look at each other)?

Tags: Sociology, animal sociology, animal rights, human rights, cross-species/interspecies ethics, social theory, philosophy of animal rights

---

Our new header is by **C. 勒 / Pegi Freespeech**.

Original: C. 勒 und Tschördy, *Antispeziesismus und Kunst: zu Demarkationslinien*, p. 21.

In: *E-Reader: Gruppe Messel*, Jahrgang 6, Nr. 3, 2024.

ISSN 2700-6905. Edition Farangis.

<https://d-nb.info/1323615423>

<https://d-nb.info/1323615423/34>

Revised 24 April 2026

# Syl Ko: Why look at animals (when humans do not want to look at each other)?

Presentation given as part of the event  
(AGAINST) ANIMAL CAPITALISM  
Two-day symposium on animals in society  
Saturday 28 & Sunday 29 March 2026

Screening Room | Mezzanine

<https://www.emst.gr/en/events-en/against-animal-capitalism#about>

[accessed 19 April 2026]

[https://www.emst.gr/web3/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/](https://www.emst.gr/web3/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/AGAINST-ANIMAL-CAPITALISM-ENG.pdf)

AGAINST-ANIMAL-CAPITALISM-ENG.pdf

[accessed 19 April 2026]

The presentation is available online at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bAZSiRrOaU>

and at <https://archive.org/> [accessed 23 April 2026]

Image credits for the presentation linked above:

Mooni Perry (slides 7 and 10)

Wikimedia Commons

Stock images

## Syl Ko: Why look at animals (when humans do not want to look at each other)?

Are we morally justified in using other animals for our benefit but to their detriment, such as eating them or using them in scientific experimentation? This question remains controversial. The dominant approach to this question has primarily relied on interrogating the legitimacy of the sharp moral divide drawn between humans and all other animals. Those who criticise human practices that harm other animals often conclude that attributing value to the mere fact of belonging to the species *homo sapiens* is arbitrary and prejudiced, no different from attributing value to a particular race, sex, or other such category. However, we argue that for those critical of these practices, a second question arises that must also be addressed: how should one pose and respond to the moral question about nonhuman animals given the alarming rate at which human injustice occurs? Our concern is not simply one about strategy. Motivating the second question is the substantive concern that the prevalence of systematic human injustice implies a fundamental moral disregard for human life, which runs counter to animal advocates' claims. We suggest that if humans systematically lack the moral vision to "see" one another clearly, then that vision will most certainly fail when directed to "look" at other beings. To accommodate the second question, we propose re-presenting the first, the moral question about nonhuman animals, within the project of revaluing humanness.

*[Slide 1]*

My name is Syl Ko. I'm a writer and independent researcher. Within the context of this exhibit, I would summarize my research interest as "why look at animals (when humans do not want to look at each other)?"

*[Slide 2]*

For the past year I have been collaborating on a text with the author Lindgren Johnson, whose book "Race Matters, Animal Matters" was published in 2017. That same year I co-authored with the writer Aph Ko "Aphro-ism", which, like Lindgren's work, deals with the intertwined nature of race and animality. Lindgren and I initially collaborated in 2021, on an essay titled "Re-Centering the Human." Our current project is a development on that essay.

The theme that runs through our work concerns the presentation of the moral question about nonhuman animals.

*[Slide 3]*

This question is one that asks about the propriety of our practices, customs, traditions, and rituals that involve the use of nonhuman animals usually to their detriment, such as using them for food, scientific endeavors, entertainment, sport, companionship, *etc.*

In "Aphro-ism", Aph Ko and I draw attention to how this question is commonly approached, which is to immediately reframe it as a question about the categorical moral divide assumed to exist between humans and all other animals. The assumption is that it is the drawing of this line that gives rise to animals' disparate treatment. So, the debate surrounding the moral question about animals regarding the propriety of our practices involving them is transformed at the outset into one about whether that categorical moral division is legitimate.

[Slide 4]

This is why you see massive amounts of empirical data and scientific research about human beings and (especially) nonhuman animals launched from each side of this debate. Those who defend practices like eating meat draw on and present data they believe prove that all or most nonhuman animals lack whatever it is that bestows upon humans unique moral consideration, thus justifying the moral line dividing humans from animals. Those who are critical of these practices involving animals will draw on and present data they believe prove that there is no capacity or characteristic unique to humans that would justify privileging human moral interests over other animals' interests if those animals share that same capacity or characteristic. Thus, they argue that the moral line is unjustified and ought to be eroded.

[Slide 5]

Furthermore, they think to challenge these practices NECESSITATES “desanctifying” humanness, meaning: humans have bloated their status to mythic proportion by making their mere humanness, the mere belonging to the species *homo sapiens*, the supreme value on the planet. So, elevating animals or securing for them the moral recognition they deserve entails deflating the importance and centrality of humanness and, thus, of human beings.

And what often goes unspoken is that these sorts of debates are always *very* theoretical- as in literally beholden to ethical theories. Whatever the favored ethical theory designates as the special capacity or property that confers upon beings moral status will dictate whatever data each side of the debate will obsess over. For instance, if the theory proposes that the capacity to suffer pain and enjoy pleasure is *the* property that qualifies one as morally considerable, each side will dig up and present data that evidences which animals feel pain or enjoy pleasure and to what degree, and so on.

[Slide 6]

In the essay “Re-Centering the Human,” Lindgren and I push back on this debate’s interpretation of what it means for there to exist a moral categorical line dividing humans from other animals. We express doubt that the *having* or the *not-having* of some particular capacity or characteristic is relevant to this division and we express even larger doubts that this division has much to do with the maintenance of the practices in question. We propose that this moral line dividing humans from other animals is fairly harmless insofar as nonhuman animals are concerned. It is *simply the result of human beings situating themselves in their own species concept*. Namely, it’s just humans operating from their human perspective. It’s not the sort of thing that requires justification.

[Slide 7]

In other words, human beings can apprehend what a human is from two different perspectives. One is the perspective with which we apprehend all other animals. For instance, if you present me with a lineup of different animals, I can say: “*that is a bat, that is an elephant, that is a human, that is a fish,*” and so on and I can make claims about each animal listed as I go down the line, which can be backed up with scientific data about each animal. Let’s call this the external perspective of being human or a “species-objectivist” stance. We are not making any knowledge claims here with the term “objective.” We just mean we are observing humanness or being human from a third-party, impartial angle no different than how we observe batness or elephantness.

[Slide 8]

However, something happens when we arrive at “human” in the species lineup that does not happen with any other species category. A second perspective opens because *I am a human!* So, a perspectival shift occurs from “*that is a human*” to “*I am a human*” or the identification with one’s own species and with that shift comes a shift in the type of information you have access to. The internal perspective of being human or what we call the “species-subjectivist” perspective is a vantage point I *cannot* apprehend for *any other animal* and about which I must

remain silent with regard to any other animal. While it is true that I know other animals experience a variety of emotions, enjoy pleasure and suffer pain, remember, imagine, have sophisticated social lives and relations, and so on, I am unable to access the interiority of what these experiences are like *from their perspective* or *for them*. Even if we can empathize with animals and can know the intricacies of their lives to a certain degree, *we cannot subjectively experience their vantage point*. (And by the way, for those of you wondering whether this reasoning applies to other categories, like race, sex, *etc.*, please email me so that I can explain why species membership is *not* like those categories.)

Lindgren and I argue that the transformation of the moral question about animals to this other question about the legitimacy of the moral divide between human beings and all other animals, is entirely uncalled for and unnecessary, especially if you are challenging practices that harm animals. That's because the moral question about animals is one that originates from the human internal or species-subjective perspective while the ensuing reframed debate is playing out at the human external or species-objectivist perspective. To make this clearer, let's look at an example.

Imagine you move to a new town and you ask your neighbor for the route to your new job, which starts tomorrow. The neighbor disappears into his office and you hear a printer hard at work back there. The neighbor re-emerges with . . .

*[Slide 9]*

an astounding, large print-out of the dazzling famous Blue Marble photo of Earth taken by the Apollo 17 crew. But, of course, the image will not do. Despite the printout's grand size, detail and beauty, not to mention a few impressive current scientific metrics charitably added to the side, your question is better answered by a vastly different *kind* of image of Earth, such as . . .

*[Slide 10]*

that offered by Google Maps, from the perspective of being *on* Earth.

The misguided neighbor may have provided you with the most scientifically and cosmically accurate portrayal of Earth and you may even understand his eagerness to share the picture given the enormity and beauty of what is displayed, the many numbers to ponder and drown into, and the various thoughts provoked by apprehending our home from a perspective that is without. But ultimately your question cannot be answered or even addressed from this distant conception of Earth for what you are seeking concerns what is on Earth, including

[Slide 11]

the routes and paths we pave, the buildings we construct, the transportation services we devise, and the ideas that frame these entities: “towns,” “cities,” “streets,” “bus lines,” *etc.* Your question is a *local* question for which one requires a *local* conception of Earth to answer, let alone to make the question itself intelligible.

[Slide 12]

Like this example shows, we create parameters for what our life should look like from the perspective at which we actually live out that life. And a large fraction of those parameters for what we think our life should look like is what we call *human morality* or guidelines for how human beings ought to live and flourish in that life. The existence of the entire animal rights movement presupposes this moral divide is intact because it is our *humanness* understood in the subjective sense to which animal rights advocates ultimately appeal. From the species-objectivist perspective, the animal rights mission makes little sense.

From that perspective, all humans are animals. But lots of animals eat other animals all the time. It benefits them and probably tastes good to them. So, why is it a moral issue when humans do it? This kind of question can only be answered from the species-subjective perspective, which requires metaphorically standing in the shoes of a human and apprehending oneself as distinct from other animals. This gesture is not one of superiority but an acknowledgement that being subject to the dictates of human morality is the responsibility of human beings and human beings alone.

[Slide 13]

Our earlier works and our current project serve as examples for how we can use the species subjective perspective to think through the moral question about animals and challenge practices that harm them.

In our earlier works, we discuss systematic human injustices, the human “isms”, such as racism, sexism, antisemitism, homophobia, ableism, *etc.* alongside injustices inflicted *by* humans upon other animals. We place these phenomena on the same analytical plane, but not to compare them and certainly not to pretend they are similar. Rather, we do so to demonstrate how they are very distinct *forms* of suffering and that acknowledging that distinction does not belittle animal suffering. To the contrary. It honors how remarkably unique that terror must be for those animals experiencing entire lives of subjugation and horror without even a map to the interiority or motives of those who crush them.

[Slide 14]

When we set systematic human injustice beside systematic animal injustice, the mechanism underlying human injustice becomes salient. Despite the differences inherent in the various human “-isms” what they share is their purpose: to systematically and at the level of definition *exclude certain human beings from the very concept of “human.”* In some cases, this is made explicit, in other cases, it is not. But most human societies, if not all, operate and depend on a social organizing principle that sorts its human members along degrees of humanity according to the ideals of that society: from “Human” – top rank – down to humans considered “not Human”, “Subhuman” or “Animal.” This is not merely a divisive tool but is fundamental to each society as it establishes what *exemplifies the ideal human being* versus what *exemplifies the opposite of that ideal.*

[Slide 15]

So, it is *here*, in the Human/Not Human divide internal to human social worlds and specific to human life that the idea of “human” and that of “not human” / “animal” as *opposites or contraries* is devised. This is key.

[Slide 16]

Human beings marked as “not human” or “less than human” represent the living embodiment of the antithesis of humanity for that society. They are regarded morally illegible. So, they play a very important role because higher ranked human beings cannot live out or play out their superiority without other human beings to subjugate, to serve as witnesses to this Human order, to *fail* so spectacularly at their Humanity that their failure is *a priori*, to speak the words and testify about a reality in accordance with their master’s desires. Only other human beings can fulfill this anti-Human function.

This parasitic relationship transcends the physical. Although the so-called “real” or “true” Humans rely on the labor and bodies of the dehumanized humans, more importantly both groups are subjectively overridden or socially conditioned to experience themselves and others within the terms of this social order: the so-called “true” Humans are buoyant and full of themselves, feeding off not just the physical and emotional trauma endured by dehumanized human beings, but by and large, they feed off the latter’s psychic pain resulting from dehumanization and internalization of their inferiority.

[Slide 17]

If being considered “human” matters so much in cases where only human beings are involved, then humanness insofar as we understand it in the *gross* sense, as the mere belonging to the species *homo sapiens* seems *not* valued at the level of society. In fact, it appears that when humans build and shape their societies, they go out of their way to ensure that the morally operative conception of “human” is *not* simply belonging to the species *homo sapiens*. So, animal rights advocates call to “desanctify” humanness is not as radical as they think given this is what humans have been doing since establishing largescale societies a long, long time ago.

*[Slide 18]*

In closing, our works suggest that the question about animal moral status should be repositioned within this larger problem surrounding the open question about human moral status or the status of humanness. That is, the situation of animals seems to be a byproduct of the schema internal to human worlds that is primarily designed to devalue humanness: this *social* Human-Animal divide. It's not that humans are more important than nonhuman animals and that's why we want to focus on the internal human world here. Rather, animal injustice is reflective of what appears to be a larger moral crisis occurring within the human and human societies, a crisis that has unfortunately been normalized.

*[Slide 19]*

So, we believe the schema underlying this crisis – our devaluation of humanness, *which is our own condition* – may also prevent the possibility of our valuing any other form of life at the widespread, societal level. Which brings us back to our opening question: why look at animals when we humans do not want to look at each another?

And this is where our current project picks up.

Thank you.

[sylko@protonmail.com](mailto:sylko@protonmail.com)

## The author:

Syl Ko is a writer and independent researcher. Her work examines the concepts “human” and “animal” highlighting their abstract interdependence and the way it restricts human and animal freedom. Ko challenges traditional approaches to animal advocacy by reframing the moral question about animals as one that is, at its core, an open question about the moral status of human beings. She emphasises that societal devaluation of animal lives is occasioned by a prior devaluation of humanness. Her work rejects the conventional reliance on moral theory; instead, it encourages a mode of reflection that aims to restore humanity, and through which we might see animals anew.

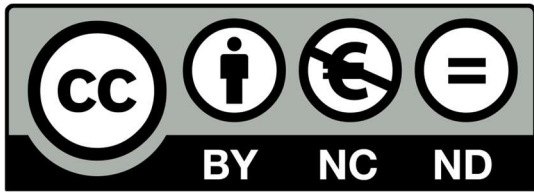
## Tierautonomie

Publisher: [www.simorgh.de](http://www.simorgh.de) – ‘Society, conflict and the anthropogenic dilemma’.  
*This reader is published by the Edition Farangis in context with the memorial project dedicated to the work of Dr. phil. Miriam Y. Arani.*

## Citation

Ko, Syl (2026). Why look at animals (when humans do not want to look at each other)? *TIERAUTONOMIE*, 12 (2).

[http://simorgh.de/tierautonomie/JG12\\_2026\\_2.pdf](http://simorgh.de/tierautonomie/JG12_2026_2.pdf)



Leser\_innen dürfen diese Publikation kopieren und verbreiten, solange ein Verweis auf den/die Autor\_innen und das Journal TIERAUTONOMIE gegeben wird. Die Verwendung ist ausschließlich auf nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke eingeschränkt und es dürfen keine Veränderungen am Textmaterial vorgenommen werden. Weitere Details zu dieser Creative Commons Lizenz findet sich unter <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. Alle anderen Verwendungszwecke müssen von dem/den Autor\_innen und den Herausgeber\_innen von TIERAUTONOMIE genehmigt werden.

Erratum:

In der letzten Ausgabe der *Tierautonomie* befand sich ein fehlerhafter Link in der Zitationsangabe.

We, the Gruppe Messel, are a multispecies network dedicated to > Eurohippus messelensis and the world heritage known as the Messel Formation > and with it: today's work in Animal Rights!



*Animal Obscura* by Farangis G. Yegane Arani.

## Impressum

Edition Farangis  
Untergasse 7 / Marstallweg 8  
61250 Usingen / Taunus  
Deutschland  
mail@farangis.de  
Tel. + 49 6081 6 88 24 49  
www.farangis.de

Autor:innen: Syl Ko

Illustrationen/Illustrator:in: Bildelement im Titel von Pegi Freespeech (勒, C. / Pegi / Pegasus 1233 Freespeech)

Herausgeber:innen: Gita Marta Yegane Arani, Lothar Yegane Arani; Tierrechte Messel, Edition Farangis

Erscheinungsdatum: April 2026

Kontakt Daten: www.farangis.de

Copyrights: Edition Farangis 2026



*© Edition Farangis, Usingen / Taunus, 2026*