

What is our relationship to the world around us? How do we fit into the environment? Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are the most significant part of the universe.<sup>1</sup> I find it fascinating to see how humans can either consider themselves a part of nature, or think of themselves as a superior species. Of course, there is a middle ground; most people fall into this space. Does the fact that humans can connect on a deep level grant us the right to call ourselves “superior”?

It is captivating how living creatures model actions and behaviors that are morally incorrect, such as: greed, selfishness, and murder. People’s morals seem to change when the species of discussion changes. The view that humans have greater intrinsic value than other species also influences ethical judgments about interactions with other organisms. These ethics are often used to legitimize treating other species in a way that would be considered morally unacceptable if humans were treated similarly.<sup>2</sup>

Humans are more complex than other species because we have reached higher levels of hierarchical needs. Intellectually speaking, they have surpassed all other species. This may be a result of humans exceeding basic living needs, such as food and safety. Abraham Maslow was an American psychologist who was best known for creating the “Hierarchy of Needs,” a theory of psychological health predicated on fulfilling innate human needs in priority, needs that ultimately define “self-actualization.” Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” states that a person “must satisfy lower level basic needs before progressing on to meet higher level growth needs. Once these needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level, called self-actualization.”<sup>3</sup> Humans have successfully tackled the lower levels, or “basic” needs, and have been able to reach towards self-actualization. A revised version of this system is the “Expanded Hierarchy of Needs.” It alters Maslow’s theory to comprise of eight main stages. After the fourth stage, a fifth and sixth stage were added, which consist of the cognitive needs and the aesthetic needs. Humans desire to know things; they also seek beauty, symmetry, balance, and form. After the seventh stage (originally stage five) an eighth tier was added, called “the transcendence needs.” It consists of helping others achieve self-actualization.<sup>4</sup> Humans have the ability to reach beyond other species due to their advanced position on this hierarchy. This ability enables humans to interact with each other in a more complex way than other species might wish to. People can develop a personality and share their morals with others, and conversations may be started that revolve around these higher needs. If humans have penetrated the higher levels of this system, does that mean they carry a higher level of importance than all other species?

Isn’t one life equally as important as another? Humans have the ability to feel compassion and empathy for other humans in completely foreign situations. They can question large concepts like life and the afterlife, and understand art and science. So should they get more credit for being more complex and successful? Should they be given more responsibility? If humans have more intellectual capabilities, they should be placed on a different pedestal than species that lack these capabilities. I believe that humans and other living things have different amounts of values. Living things all play their part on the planet, but some have bigger impacts than others. Species who have more impact have earned more responsibility in making sure they use their power in a way that will be beneficial to the planet.

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<sup>1</sup> (Merriam-Webster)

<sup>2</sup> (JRank)

<sup>3</sup> (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs)

<sup>4</sup> (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs)

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*I'd like to share a revelation that I've had during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species and I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed and the only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You're a plague and we are the cure.*

Agent Smith, *The Matrix* (1999)

Humans often see themselves as more superior to other living things, and do not apply the scientific principles that are applied to other living things to themselves. As mammals, humans display scientific concepts in everyday life. Community living, attraction, and “fight or flight” are some examples. Parasitism is defined as a relationship between two species of plants or animals in which one benefits at the expense of the other, usually without killing it.<sup>5</sup> Modern humans mimic this relationship with other species and the earth. Humans may not latch onto skin and suck blood or reside in a hummingbird’s nostrils for transportation.<sup>6</sup> Humans do, however, clear-cut forests, slaughter animals, and take fossil fuels from the earth for their homes, infrastructure, food, and transportation. They do some of these things in an unsustainable manner that harms the planet. Humans abuse their power and ignore the responsibility of being a steward to the planet that comes with that power. How did humans get that power in the first place?

Societies were the birth of the intellectual human. They allowed humans to become advanced because basic needs became more easily met as larger groups of people worked together to survive. Modern societies have grocery stores, jobs, and homes to aid people in meeting basic necessities. The specialization of work allowed a part of society to focus their efforts on less basic things—like art, philosophy, innovations, and music. This allowed human societies to become more intellectually aware and develop morality, surpassing other species. With power comes responsibility. The additional intellectual awareness humans have comes with the responsibility of taking care of the planet that they thrive on, and to respect the other living things around them. Modern humans are by no means respecting the planet. In order for the distinction between human and non-human to exist, humans must keep up their responsibility of being a steward to the earth. Humans must carry the burden of caring for the planet if they wish to use it to further their success as a species.

The theory of Anthropocentrism, or human supremacy, states that humans are above all other species and are more valuable than other species. It states that the *raison d'être* of evolution was to evolve mankind. Also, the theory presents the idea that humans have more complex interactions with other organisms.<sup>7</sup>

Different religions have formed their views on this “man over beast” concept. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam tells us that God put animals and plants on the earth for our use, and that we should have dominance over the earth God has given us, all the while not being

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<sup>5</sup> (Parasitism)

<sup>6</sup> (Parasitism - Nosey Stowaways)

<sup>7</sup> (JRank)

wasteful or disrespectful to the creatures of the earth.<sup>8</sup> Buddhism, Hinduism, and Daoism have a more egalitarian view of their relationship with other species. In Genesis 1:26 (ESV), it is stated that, “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”<sup>9</sup> Even in this verse, there are translation arguments with the word *dominion*. In some older versions of the Old Testament, dominion means *to have control over*, and in others (more popularly accepted in Protestantism) dominion means *to have stewardship over*. In the social aspect, most people believe that they are inherently more important than other species. Humans are raised to believe that they are special and that they are at the top of the food chain. Some are raised to fear and respect other living things, and others are raised to have pride in their humanity and assert their dominance over other living things.<sup>10</sup> Scientifically speaking, human supremacy cannot be proven fact or fiction. Scientists may be able to study it, but they are unable to definitively prove it, because unlike a virus or a disease, human supremacy is an opinion.<sup>11</sup> There are no biological facts that state that humans are better, more evolved, or more important than other species.<sup>12</sup>

Humans exploit and assert their dominance over the land, because they believe they are the most important species. Dominance is not the same as importance, however. Humans need to understand that they are dependent on the earth that they are slowly destroying. In order to fuel such a powerful species, the earth needs to have those other species for humans to control and manage. If they destroy their dominated species, they will no longer have anything to have power over, thus removing the illusion that power was ever in the hands of humans.

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<sup>8</sup> (Cengage)

<sup>9</sup> (Genesis 1:26)

<sup>10</sup> (Superior Human)

<sup>11</sup> (Science)

<sup>12</sup> (Superior Human)

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