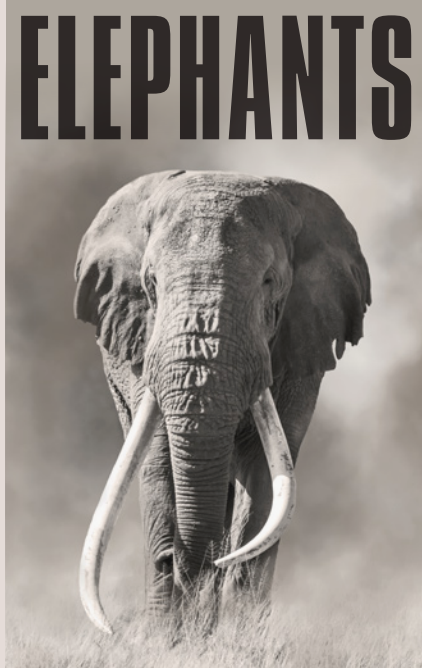


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Among my earliest childhood memories is loving elephants. As soon as I first laid eyes on them in the San Diego Zoo, I was fixated. I still am. Not too long ago, at its relatively new Safari Park, I stood for an hour watching these pachyderms of all ages in their new enormous enclosure, enjoying a massive water feature. Now, every time I fire up YouTube, it knows of my interest; I am immediately fed the latest in elephant news and entertainment.

Right up there with horses and racing. You probably know, however, that you'll never see elephants in a major American circus anymore. No more elephant riding, either. Even that is endangered in parts of the world where it goes back centuries, along with forest work. Zoos now breed their own.

Which brings me to the difference between animal welfare and animal "rights," which is the crux of the problem horse racing faces everywhere it still exists, not to mention all horses in sport.

Owing to many, many factors, animals in our contemporary world have increasingly and vocally been portrayed as having rights, just like humans. (Or as humans should, we might more exactly say.) Even some of the more moderate organizations that oppose horse racing couch their fundamental opposition in the bogus claim that there is no critical difference among species, human and non-human (just as there is none among races of humans) ... that to believe there is such a difference is to be "speciesist." Which, to

our enemies, is at par with racist on the continuum of odious and repulsive.

Truth be told (not particularly important for those who would destroy equine sport), there are in fact critically important differences between species, and types of sentient beings.

The most critical is that only humans among all species can conceive of the very notions of welfare and conservation! Other sentient beings cannot, even if they experience rudimentary "feelings." Nor can they conceptualize their own welfare, let alone of the welfare of other animals or sentient beings. Only humans can make intellectual choices. Don't these simple irrefutable facts order the species, in favor of humans over all others?

Humans formed the first (and only) animal welfare organizations. Animals didn't. Humans developed conservation. Animals didn't. Humans developed veterinary medicine, not animals, as well as genetics, domesticated breeding programs, and on and on.

For better or worse, humans also discovered and elaborated anthropomorphism ... the attribution of human behavior or characteristics to animals. Insects. Or objects. The world now has humanistic talking and thinking animals of virtually every description—crickets and ants, and even cars, machines, weapons, and airplanes. We think nothing of it, do we? Yet it tempts us—dangerously—to consider all of those as members of our own family.

To do so is fantasyland. "Alternate realities and facts," products of humans, are counters to objective truth. They threaten all humans. And, therefore, all animals. This kind of "intelligence" is not just artificial, it's destructive. Its potential ramifications are frightening, to any human capable of fear. Would anyone like to see a "friendly" nuclear weapon arrive? Nor can I forget the three young jokesters in 2007 who thought a tiger in a San Francisco zoo might be fun to provoke—until she killed one of them.

The anthropomorphist or vegan humans who hate racing and all organized activities with non-humans (including pet owning), which they claim must require the animals' "informed consent," seriously threaten the future of all equine sport. They have captured the attention of the world's media; they capitalize on the contemporary and widespread emotion that animals are part of our own family, exploiting any relatively rare incident of abuse or sheer accident as a reflection on the whole of sport. The media embraces and embellishes the

controversy without understanding the dangers of its origin.

Sadly, it is we who have bred these elephants in our room. Even though horse racing above all other equestrian activities has advanced the equine standard of care and veterinary medicine immeasurably and inexorably—for centuries now, worldwide, that exceptional standard has collided with market economics and human greed, to the detriment of the race horse—imperiling the very sport itself. We have increasingly been breeding potential unsoundness to unsoundness for at least half a century, then disguising and possibly amplifying conformation defects with cosmetic surgeries. And we wonder why our horses are more fragile?!

In America, our breed registry's grandees have looked everywhere but in the mirror for the sport's villains. In so doing, they have invited, stimulated, and even enhanced horse racing's growing disrepute. They have cast blame for our woes on trainers, veterinarians, therapeutic medications, track operators, state regulators, and even the bedrock of American law—due process—but not on themselves. Their new, elaborate, often indecipherable enormity of national rules wrongly purport to address every potential weakness in the sport. But not weakness in the breed itself, for which they themselves must be held responsible.

The aim of breeding a better horse is the foundation of horsemanship. Or it should be. By "better," for a couple hundred years, we meant both more durable and more tenacious for racing—racing as a test of stamina, substance, and soundness. "Commercial" breeding, for the sake of breeding itself and financial return at sales, not to mention glory at two and three, with quick retirement to repeat the cycle, is failing the breed itself. Obviously.

Our sport's aristocrats, who are so fascinated with the efficacy of their new rules, have long needed a look at their mirrors. Let's see if they can also regulate their own house—registration, breeding, selling—developing effective deterrence to and prohibitions on the perpetuation of fragility and unsoundness. Can they incentivize breeding for racing, to test substance and stamina?

That's the elephant in our room: the critical, fundamental need to breed a sounder horse. **T**