

Animals vs Humans: Are Ants Superior? Part. II

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Last week, my sister reminded me that I am human, and I got curious: why did she make that distinction? Why not just say animal? What makes humans stand out from other species?

In part one of Animals vs Humans: Are Ants Superior? I discussed the common notion that humans are separate from animals because of our remarkable cognitive functions; we can develop complex structures, technologies, languages, and cultures and have morals and emotions. However, these abilities are already prevalent in the animal kingdom, notably through chimpanzees and ants. Though, compared to ants, our self-awareness doesn't seem to be doing us and the world any favours. So what really separates us from animals, and are ants superior?

Okay, well, maybe the next factor to consider is our dominance on Earth. Humans have literally colonized worldwide, and our population is dizzying at an outstanding 7.9 billion. However, ants outdo us again with a population of 10 billion billion worldwide, excluding Antarctica, Greenland, Iceland, and a handful of island nations.

Perhaps it is a different form of dominating that we concern ourselves with; our ability to manage other species? I think it's fair

to say that humans are the biggest threat on Earth: we domesticate and exploit other animals, regulate non-human species populations, and endlessly kill for personal and societal gain, all the while having no predators. Ants cannot compete; they prey on countless species, such as beetles, spiders, anteaters, and humans. However, predators are not superior to prey and vis versa, as both mutually dependent on the other for survival. The predator-prey relationship demonstrates this reliance. If there are no predators, the prey will eat all their food and die. If there is no prey, the predators will have no food and die. They depend on each other for population control. So in that regard, neither species comes out on top. Additionally, our control over other animals brings into consideration the **benefits** of having a conscience and morality once again. Is it moral to exploit and kill, such as using animals for their skin and fur? Well, since other animals hunt (**ants are omnivores**) and **exploit (ants have slaves)** for their own gain, it can't be immoral. It's natural, right? If that's the case, what separates us from being animals? How about killing for sport and the unnecessary torture involved in our animal industry, such as maceration?* Is that moral? Killing for sport and torture is well documented amongst "animals." For example, dolphins. Dolphins usually devour their prey once captured, though not with pufferfish. First, a pod will provoke the fish to blow up, then toss it around while nibbling it for over half an hour. Funnily enough,

dolphins do this to get high. Pufferfish are toxic, though they have an intoxicating effect when consumed in moderation. It's like a sick game of marijuana volleyball. Ironically, dolphins are often associated with being highly intelligent, friendly, and playful creatures. I guess they are pretty playful, after all. So if other animals kill for sport and torture, it also must be natural. Well then, what separates us from animals? Nonetheless, I think that exploiting (when not strictly needed for survival), killing for sport, and torture is immoral as it causes unnecessary pain. So, in this regard, ants come out on top once again since they don't kill for sport or unnecessarily torture their prey.

What about survival? Humans have been around for 300,000 years, and suffice to say, we have made great strides in our survival throughout the past decades. Take our life expectancy over the past 200 years. With our ever-expanding medical field, humans live over two times longer. In contrast, ants have existed for more than 100 million years and can live up to 30. In addition, they survived numerous explosive events; the most notable was the meteor that killed off 80 percent of species, including dinosaurs, 65 million years ago. However, the most catastrophic event humans encountered was the Toba supervolcano 75,000 years ago in Indonesia. Despite almost being wiped out, we survived the eruption, but it is nothing compared to the asteroid ants weathered, considered the fifth mass extinction. Yet,

despite modern civilization remaining untested to these disastrous events, ants prevail again. Besides, they are incredibly resilient; they can live in almost any habitat and withstand radioactivity humans cannot. So, if there were a sixth mass extinction, I'd put my money on ants.

The last factor to consider is what each species brings to the world's table. Ants are crucial to the biosphere; they fertilize and aerate the soil, allowing plants to thrive. Many plants and animals would die without them, and entire habitats would not survive. Additionally, Earth's landscape would look drastically uglier as ants are highly efficient at decomposing plant and animal matter. Without them, our landscape would be filled with carcasses, manure, and dead vegetation, while our soil would lack nutrition making farming incredibly difficult. Ants are one of the most vital species on Earth, and even we need them to survive. On the other hand, our species have done nothing for the benefit of Earth. We are the reason for climate change. Our actions, such as deforestation and pollution, have led to a mass decrease in biodiversity. In fact, there is an ongoing sixth mass extinction, the Anthropocene extinction, and we are causing it. Our demise would help life on Earth. So, regarding which species Earth needs more for survival, it is, without question, ants.

Thus, to answer my questions. Are ants superior? I think it's hard to compare species as each species has evolved differently to survive

their niche. It's like comparing water bottles to cars. Yes, humans may outshine other species with our cognitive functions, but that's just how we have evolved to survive. We did not evolve with the ability to become invisible like a squid or to be biologically immortal like some jellyfish, but that's what makes each species unique. Evolution has shaped us into whom we need to be to thrive. Being highly intelligent and having morality is not a requirement. So what separates humans from animals? Our ego. I think we are obsessed with being "special" and want to distance ourselves from the negative connotations we prescribed to the word "animal," primitive, wild, and barbaric. We want to believe we are sophisticated and modern. We want to believe we are Homo Transcendens instead of Homo Sapiens. In reality, we are just another species of animal. Besides, who's to say other animals aren't superior when we don't completely understand them yet? Maybe we are the ones lacking.

Either way, I am a Homo Sapiens, and I am glad my sister reminded me of that.