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The Role of Activist & Media Communication in Helping Humanity Establish its Responsibility Toward Fellow Animals

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The Role of Activist and Media Communication in Helping Humanity Establish its Responsibility Toward Fellow Animals

By Carrie P. Freeman, PhD

ABSTRACT: This chapter explores how communication is the fundamental means by which animal and environmental advocates and the media can increase awareness of and accountability for our harmful actions toward nonhuman animals in the Anthropocene era in order to facilitate restorative public intervention on their behalf. I first outline the ethical principle of responsibility to demonstrate what it means for humans to bear moral responsibility for intentional oppression of nonhuman animals as well as negligent self-centered actions that routinely disadvantage other animals and disproportionately usurp or damage resources upon which they depend. Put in context of scholarly literature on strategic communication for social change, I propose that animal advocates should communicate four claims to justify and inspire intervention on behalf of nonhuman animals. This includes establishing: 1) nonhuman animals' worth as persons, 2) our relevant ethical values and duties in favor of justice, reparations, caring, peace, and freedom, 3) our fault and responsibility for the harm and systematic exploitation of nonhuman animals, and 4) effective solutions, both regulatory and voluntary, to the problems we have caused so we can restore fellow animals' health and freedom.

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with an audacious opening statement: All humans should take responsibility for ending our roles in oppressing nonhuman animals and contributing to their demise and the demise of our ecosystems, as we are culpable to various degrees and in various ways. Built into this declaration are many assumptions that I will unpack in this chapter to show that fellow animals are worthy of our help, need our help, and are owed our help due to the active and often intentional part we play in their oppression – an oppression that has become so routine, accepted, and relatively benign that to even refer to our lifestyles as “oppressive” seems hyperbolic. By “oppression,” I mean the discriminatory practices that any human society designs, engages in, and legally justifies that use/exploit certain animals primarily as objects for our own pursuits rather than respecting those beings as sovereign subjects (persons) in their own right. To put it bluntly, we are oppressive specifically toward nonhuman animals when we: farm them; breed, rape, or sexually manipulate them; genetically manipulate them; kidnap/steal them from their free life, family, and home; keep them captive for profit; hunt them for sport, recreation, and non-sustenance food; research upon them beyond participant observation in their natural habitats; and use/exploit their bodies and labor.

But we also harm them less intentionally, perhaps more negligently, through modern lifestyles of our industrialized human societies that pollute the planet; deplete, destroy, or commandeer shared resources and habitats; and interfere with healthy ecological processes, all of which have cumulatively led to critical issues such as mass extinction of species and anthropogenic global warming. I think it is apt that some scientists have renamed our geological era the anthropocene to foreground the direct influence of the human species on the planet (Stromberg, 2013). I think it fitting that the word “obscene” seems to resonate within the pronunciation of the word anthropocene, and may on some level serve as motivation to act.

Our actions should include speaking up in solidarity for anyone who is oppressed (human and nonhuman) in our societies, as humans also continue to discriminate against members of our own species based on race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, class, etc. creating a legacy of injustice and inequality and a mentality of hierarchy and privilege. The American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. provided motivation for activists of all

causes to work together when he declared that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

As a media scholar, my contribution to this book is to discuss how communication is the fundamental means by which we can enable intervention to begin to be aware of and accountable for our harmful actions. While I may be speaking of what activists, scholars, and the media can do, it is ultimately in the effort of reaching the general public and encouraging their intervention and political leverage of decision-makers. As I am making a case that we are all responsible, I first explore the ethical principle of responsibility. I will follow this with literature on strategic communication and activists’ use of media before proposing four claims that animal advocates should be communicating to inspire intervention on behalf of nonhuman animals. This includes establishing their worth as persons, our ethical values, our fault and responsibility for their harm and exploitation, and effective solutions to the problems we have caused.

RESPONSIBILITY

In studying the values upon which social movements base their appeals, I have an affinity for the value of responsibility. Collective action framing by activists would be null if it lacked a call to action to solve problems (Snow & Benford, 1988). And if someone is called to act, it is upon the basis that he or she bears some responsibility – a reason or obligation to respond to the problem; either he or she is blameworthy, implicated, involved, and/or has the capacity to help.

Our moral responsibility can be viewed within the lens of moral philosophies such as the ethic of care and duty-based ethics. In his list of primary duties, William David Ross (1930) includes the duties of reparation, justice, beneficence, and non-injury, which I find most applicable to this chapter. While Ross presumably intends for these to be duties of human beings toward other humans, humans can (and, I contend, should) certainly apply them to nonhuman beings who we have unjustly injured. While the duty of beneficence (kindness and active aid) toward others is recommended but not something we can always practice, the duty to avoid injuring others should be privileged as the least we must do. I see the duty of reparation for faults as a complement to the duties of justice and non-injury. Reparation entreats us to rectify the injuries we cause to innocent beings, especially where unwarranted. This coincides with the

notion of restorative justice, as discussed by Julia Mosquera in this book. Simply put, when you wrong someone, you owe it to them to make things right if you can.

Feminist philosophers following the care tradition also embrace the notion of responsibility but talk about it not in terms of justice, rights, or duties, but rather in terms of care, love, relationships, sharing, needs, and community (Benhabib, 1992; Donovan and Adams 2007; Gilligan, 1982). Joan Tronto (2012) argues that responsibilities are largely relational, and based on how our lives are intertwined. Breaking down the word (response-ability), when you have the ability to respond to a need, you should, as we rely upon one other, as interdependent beings in a community. That moral community should include nonhuman animals, as sentient beings are our kin (Donovan and Adams, 2007; Steiner, 2008). Gary Steiner (2008) suggests that before we will act, human kinship with fellow animals must be *felt*, not just rationally agreed to. In experiencing this kinship, he says we must see ourselves as part of a larger natural environment where we have moral obligations toward other sentient beings, regardless of their ability to reciprocate or advocate in our justice system on behalf of their own interests. The book *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* describes a potential path for this inclusion by viewing nonhuman animals as having various types of citizenship that should be respected and considered in policy-making decisions (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011).

COMMUNICATION

How we view our responsibility to fellow community members, and whom we see as part of our community, is reliant on communication. This includes the language and frames we use in our cultures, particularly through media, to describe the relations between nonhuman and human animals or to hide or make visible our culpability. This section provides an overview of: a) communication as a primary means of constructing shared cultural meanings, and the power of discourse to define ‘truth’ and social practices; b) strategic communication and collective action framing by social movements; c) the role of the media in activism; and d) four primary claims I believe we should establish when constructing collective action frames to inspire the public to intervene on behalf of nonhuman animals.

A. The Social Construction of Meaning:

Communication is sometimes reductively perceived as a linear process of information exchange, but cultural scholars define it via a process of social signification and shared meaning-making. Our systems of communication, rather than being fixed or purely ‘natural,’ are a social construction whereby societies intentionally signify objects and concepts through language (using signs and symbols) to determine what they stand for and how they are supposed to be understood within a culture (Hall, 1997). This means language is malleable and we can change what concepts mean. Michel Foucault (1990a) notes that our integrated system of representation and social practices (otherwise known as “discourse”) regarding any concept is culturally and historically specific, thus, can evolve over place and time.

As the fundamental basis of any culture, communication is the very process through which a cultural identity is created and modified (Carey, 1989). But this process is not fully organic or benign, as dominant culture and elites can use institutions like the media to promote a certain self-serving worldview and manufacture consent to make their ideology seem like taken-for-granted common sense to the public, which can marginalize alternative worldviews (Chomsky and Herman, 1988; Stuart Hall, 1982). Steven Lukes (2004) describes this as radical power, when our very identity and desires are cultivated to fit the interests of those in power so that the status quo seems inevitable or ‘natural’ and we do not necessarily feel oppressed nor acknowledge that a wide variety of alternative options exist.

In defining the relationship between power, knowledge, and truth, Foucault (1980) contends that discourse has the capacity to control social practices and preserve institutional power through its management of what society considers to be ‘truth’ and knowledge on a topic. Discourse operates like a grammar – a system of constraint that rules in and out ‘sensible’ ways of talking about a topic; because discourse is the means by which truth is negotiated as part of ongoing ideological struggle, Foucault (1990b) describes discourse as “the power that is to be seized” (p. 1155). From an ethical standpoint for activists crafting discursive strategies, consider James Carey’s (1989) ritual view of communication that sees the purpose of communication not as control but ideally as *community-building*, as it is my contention in this chapter that we need to widen our notion of community to include all Earthlings.

B. Social Movement Communication & Framing:

Social movement organizations, with their limited resources in comparison to opponents, are especially challenged to strategically use communication to transform hegemonic discourses that have naturalized injustice. Activists need to convince the public that the commonly-accepted view of reality is based on a flawed premise and the normalized situation actually deserves to be defined as a *problem* that warrants their attention (Stewart, Smith, and Denton, 2001). DeLuca & Peeples (2002) describe this goal as “making the mundane malevolent” (p. 145); in the context of animal activists, they must make routine animal *use* be seen as animal *abuse*. Once the problem has been established, Stewart, Smith and Denton (2001) instruct activists to emphasize its severity, the reluctance or inability of authorities to resolve it, and the need for and usefulness of the public’s immediate social intervention.

The social movement scholarly literature acknowledges that activist groups not only need to mobilize resources and take advantage of political opportunities, but to motivate collective action, they also must tap into cultural identity when strategically communicating, known as “framing,” (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996). People use frames as a cognitive interpretive device to make sense of situations by organizing them into familiar, meaningful categories (Goffman, 1974). Social movement communicators can use the power of framing to help people identify problems and solutions: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). To promote collective action, social movement messages must include three framing components: 1) diagnostic (define the problem and possibly attribute blame), 2) prognostic (define solutions), and 3) motivational (encourage action as fitting and efficacious) (Snow & Benford, 1988). William Gamson (1992) describes this goal in terms of highlighting injustice, encouraging people to identify with the social cause and its activists, and promoting agency through inspiring effective collective action.

C. The Role of Mass Media:

To gain attention for issues, all organizations seek out the news media for its agenda-setting power in influencing public policy and prioritizing social issues in the minds of the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The media is the primary means of social signification in modern societies, as it both manufactures and reflects discourse, and as such it is the site of much ideological struggle (Hall, 1982). In this struggle, activists and minority groups are struggling more than dominant organizations to get legitimate and credible recognition, as the news often focuses more on protest *actions* than the issues activists are protesting against (Gitlin, 2003; Ryan, Carragee and Schwerner, 1998; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail and Augustyn, 2001). DeLuca and Peeples (2002) defend protest actions, arguing that, to end real violence against victims of oppression, activists must construct newsworthy acts of “symbolic violence” (p. 138) such as unruly or controversial demonstrations; these “image events” function as “visual philosophical-rhetorical fragments, mind bombs that expand the universe of thinkable thoughts” (p. 144).¹ Activists do this to be able to compete with the daily media spectacles from the pervasive public relations and advertising efforts of corporations and the state (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002). James Jasper (1997) celebrates the fact that activists serve a unique pro-social role in balancing out commercially-oriented media discourse with their moral visions, allowing society to be self-reflective about needed improvements.

Scholars studying the political economy of the media also acknowledge that activists are challenged to strategically use media communications in a commercial, corporate-owned media system dependent on (incentivized by) advertising and profit, making it less open and democratic (Chomsky and Herman, 1988; McChesney, 1999; Gitlin, 2003). It can be an economic conflict of interest for mainstream media-makers to challenge the current exploitation of nature and living beings when the media’s parent company or their advertisers may profit from that very

¹ When using any tactics and messages that might be perceived as shocking, controversial, or offensive to certain worldviews, see my guidelines for ethical activism (Freeman, 2009). As a side note, actual violence or deception toward the public is not endorsed as an ethical option for any group.

exploitation.² Therefore, I contend that while activists must pressure the mainstream media as much as we can to address injustice issues based on appeals to the media profession's social responsibility,³ we must also circumvent the filter of the commercial system (supplementing it) via use of independent/alternative media and with our own direct communication to publics, such as through face-to-face interactions, educational programs in schools and communities, and strategic use of social media, documentaries, books, and internet sites (see Freeman and Jarvis, 2013). This means that activists must get involved in:

- 1) policy-based media reform for more democratic and less commercially-dominated or government-dominated media systems,
- 2) support of noncommercial and public media outlets,
- 3) production of their own media programs to reflect an inclusive and ecologically responsible ideology or promote critical thinking to challenge social norms (ex: blogs, documentaries, books, zines, youtube videos, radio podcasts, photography, performance art, music, etc.), and
- 4) grants to fund media professionals, especially investigative journalists and documentary filmmakers, who focus on human and nonhuman animal protection/rights and environmentalism.

D. What Should Animal Advocates Communicate?

Because social movement collective action framing suggests we should define an injustice and its culpable party, recommend solutions, and then motivate people to enact those solutions, I specifically propose that to inspire intervention to end oppression of animals, we animal advocates must establish: the worth of nonhuman animals, humanity's ethical values and duties, our fault and responsibility as animal oppressors, and effective solutions for our injustices. We can do so discursively by convincing people that:

- 1) Nonhuman animals are worth caring about (based both on their similarities and differences to us as sentient earthlings), and it fits our values to care about such persons,

² Yet, to be more optimistic, we are all interdependent beings sharing the Earth and thus all need a healthy home planet, so if commercial media companies acknowledge this, it can work as an incentive (socially and economically) for them to promote environmentalism.

³ See the media style guidelines for animal issues at www.animalsandmedia.org.

- 2) We are acting wrongly when we oppress or kill them (especially if we are causing harm that is unnecessary or unjustified),
- 3) Their injuries are indeed primarily our fault (so, only we can save them), and therefore,
- 4) We must propose, debate, and enact solutions to save and restore them to health and freedom; engage in discourse about intervention, both voluntary and regulatory, and model it by taking action.

In this section, I will expand on each of these steps.

1) Fellow animals are worth caring about (based both on their similarities and differences to us as sentient earthlings), and it fits our values to care about such persons.

To maintain a sense of pride, people generally want to see themselves and their culture as civilized, ethical, and ‘good’; part of earning that identity is treating any sentient being ‘humanely.’⁴ Toward humans, this means acknowledging and maintaining their basic dignity (ex: culturally appropriate notions of clothing, healthy food, safety, sanitation and healthcare, education and psychic development, civic enfranchisement, privacy, autonomy, etc.). Toward nonhumans there is no the same notion of ‘animal dignity,’ so being ‘humane’ has tended to just mean avoiding causing wanton suffering and providing basic levels of care for injured or domesticated animals (Freeman, 2010). The latter expresses the popular belief in animal welfare that I grew up with in Western society that presumes that nonhuman animals experience feelings and desires, the most basic of which include wanting to live and be comfortable. The mainstream welfare view does not view other animals as ‘persons’ who have the right to live freely, and whose interests are as valuable as humans’; the interests of nonhumans almost always take a backseat to human benefits, even trivial ones (Francione, 1996; Singer, 1990). Western culture’s human privilege is grounded in: Greek humanism’s favoring of rationality, Cartesian dualisms of

⁴ The word ‘humane’ is associated with the animal welfare movement in the United States, as many domesticated animal rescue groups are called ‘humane societies,’ and it also indicates minimal welfare standards of decency that should be applied toward all humans to show them human dignity. However, I put ‘humane’ in quotes to indicate that it is not a trait that necessarily defines the human species, as the name might imply because it contains the word *human* within it. Not only are some humans not always kind toward others but we are also not the only species who can show kindness. Therefore, to show a humbler view of humanity in relation to the capacities of other animal species, I prefer instead to use terms like compassion or kindness, where they are warranted (see Freeman, 2010).

human/animal and soul/body, and a Judeo-Christian tradition that supports a view of humans as closer to God and separate from the animal kingdom (Taylor, 1993).

As I became involved in the animal rights movement in the early 1990s and learned of the legal industrialized exploitation of nonhuman animals and mass suffering and death my society was causing, I recognized that a belief in animal welfare alone was not enough; society needed to transition toward an animal rights view if we wanted to end the systemic exploitation of animals and transform our view of them away from being lesser beings to that of someone inherently valuable, whose life cannot be appropriated as a means to our ends. Similar to human social justice principles, animal rights goes beyond basic welfare, and seeks justice and certain rights for those who have been oppressed, based on notions of equal worth. While animal rights does not seek the civic enfranchisement or all the exact same rights that human rights does, it seeks justice for nonhumans through liberation from human control as property, and equal consideration for their interests when humans make decisions that affect nonhumans' lives (Francione, 1996; Regan, 1983; Singer, 1990). Similarly, the ethic of care approach toward nonhuman animals not only values attentiveness to their individual suffering but asks that broader attention be paid to the "political and economic systems that are causing the suffering" (Donovan and Adams, 2007, p. 3).

In trumpeting the traits animals possess that make them worthy of respect, I caution against the natural instinct to egotistically base nonhuman animal worth on the condition that they are so much like us humans. It is not going to change our subjugation of nonhumans to view them as almost-human, subhuman, or under-developed, as hierarchies that justify discrimination remain, and we still maintain a humanist discourse presupposing that human traits are the benchmark by which to assess all other living beings. In the persistent attempts to 'justify' human moral superiority, we have been challenged to find the exact morally relevant trait that distinguishes us humans from every other animal, as whatever hallmark we have historically chosen, there are some humans who do not possess the trait and some other animals that do (i.e. language-use, tool-making, artistic expression, etc.) (Freeman, 2010). For example, Bekoff and Pierce (2009) claim humans are not the only *ethical* animal, as some nonhuman animal cultures (or individual animals) also exhibit ethical principles, such as fairness and empathy. To promote some needed humility for our species, let us remind ourselves that even though the human

capability for charity and compassion is impressive, we also have the capacity to be, and often are, excessively destructive:

“I argue that while humans can admit that their ethical system may be highly complex and impressive when compared to that of other animals, this high level of sophistication appears to be necessary to restrain humanity’s special propensity for excessive harm.”
(Freeman, 2010, p. 22)

We make a habit of underestimating nonhuman species, often by overlooking them or failing to communicate with them, and I advocate giving all animals the benefit of the doubt in terms of assuming they each have a depth and complexity that perhaps we cannot know based on our limited sensibilities. Let us constantly express amazement at the wonders of their capacities, not always comparing those traits to ours but appreciating them in their own right.

In my writings I have advocated for valuing nonhumans based on how we are similar to them in some fundamental ways that promote kinship but also how they are clearly different from us and from one another in ways that make them unique and express diversity (Freeman, 2010):

“While people may come to value nonhuman animals and respect diversity, the concern is that they will still prioritize fellow humans over other animal species if they do not see some similarity that connects all animals together and gives them a reason to value other species just as they value their own species... As a shared trait, or as Burke wrote a ‘consubstantial’ unifying trait that creates a mutual identity, I suggest that Regan’s idea of being a conscious ‘subject of a life’ may be the best option; subjective consciousness is broad enough to include many animal species yet still allow for diversity within and among species. It could be compared to the consubstantial trait of *personhood* that has allowed for equality among races, genders, and ethnicities, while still allowing for diversity.” (p. 28)

Ultimately, to inspire intervention to save nonhuman animals, it is not enough for humans to see other animals as sentient or even as subjects of a life, we must also begin to move away from seeing them as the “other” and begin to see ourselves in them, taking pride in being a fellow member of the animal kingdom (Freeman, 2010). To express this empathy and kinship means using posthumanist language, such as seeing oneself as a “humanimal” (p. 29) and them as fellow persons.

2) We are acting wrongly when we exploit or kill animals or when we ignore their interests in issues that affect them (especially if we are causing harm that is unnecessary or unjustified).

This step toward establishing right and wrong depends upon the successful foundation of step one – getting us humans to recognize ourselves as fellow animals, such that we then care about the rights applicable to other animal species with whom we empathize. These basic rights are the same things we would want if we were a nonhuman species; this includes the right to: live freely in a healthy natural habitat; avoid exploitation for human profit or any unwelcomed and harmful use by humans; avoid forced captivity and control by humans (unless absolutely necessary for the animal’s livelihood and wellbeing, as in the case of injured animals); and keep one’s own skin, flesh, fur, feathers, tusks/antlers, eggs, milk, and children. Activists and media-makers should include these perspectives and interests in any stories about nonhumans (Freeman and Merskin, 2015).

In envisioning an ethical relationship with nonhuman animals, consider the core right and wrong principles of an ethic of care approach:

“It is wrong to harm sentient creatures unless overriding good will result *for them*. It is wrong to kill such animals unless in immediate self-defense or in defense of those for whom one is personally responsible. Moreover, humans have a moral obligation to care for those animals who, for whatever reason, are unable to adequately care for themselves, in accordance with their needs and wishes, as best the caregivers can ascertain them and within the limits of the caregivers’ own capacities. Finally, people have a moral duty to oppose and expose those who are contributing to animal abuse.” (Donovan and Adams 2007, p. 4)

The latter sentence in particular showcases the role of communication in intervention. But the core principles in their totality emphasize not only taking action to care for and protect animals to the extent you are able (Ross’s duty of beneficence) but also harm avoidance (Ross’s duty of non-injury).

The primary way we injure the most nonhuman animals is through farming and fishing them, not only in the intentional killing of billions of animals for human food, but also in the “collateral damage” agribusiness causes to ecosystems, wilderness, and wildlife (Freeman, 2014). I believe that as long as we are literally consuming their bodies in such a trivial and

routine fashion, we are not going to respect any nonhuman animals as kin deserving of shared space on the planet and freedom from oppression in other venues (in research labs, entertainment, fashion, etc.). So, vegan advocates must address a common argument people make for why it is “right” to eat certain nonhuman animals, namely that wild animals prey upon other animals in nature, so therefore it is fair for us to eat meat too. While it is nice to see humans looking to nature and nonhuman animals for moral guidance, we can counter this predation argument by pointing out that carnivorous or omnivorous free animals tend to only kill for their family’s own sustenance and they often do not have any choice in terms of anything else they can eat for nourishment. It is important to also note that in the wild, carnivores and omnivores are not farming anyone (breeding, keeping captive, and systematically slaughtering prey when properly fattened or ‘spent’). Nor are they killing extra animals and selling the flesh or eggs in the marketplace to profit off of them as we do. Therefore, if the human animal wants to follow nature’s guidelines, the only times it would be “right” for certain humans to be omnivorous is for sheer survival, based on subsistence hunting if plant-based foods are not geographically available; this excludes farming anyone, as outlined in my 2014 book *Framing Farming*.

In assessing right and wrong, nature’s guidelines should be considered alongside cultural guidelines, in this case, avoiding needless harm and treating others fairly (as we would want to be treated), which represents Ross’s duties of justice, reparations, beneficence, and non-injury. If we humans do not need to harm anyone to survive, and we ourselves would not want to be farmed or killed, then we should not do it to others if avoidable. Therefore, a necessary part of transitioning human societies away from farming and fishing animals is touting the healthfulness of plant-based diets, providing nutritional and culinary guidance for vegan meals, and increasing accessibility to plant-based proteins for all human groups, regardless of socioeconomic status. This fits with Melanie Joy’s (2010) contention that animal advocates must destroy the myth that eating animals is “normal, natural, and necessary” (p. 96). If humans do not need to eat animal products to survive, then meat really is murder (as the animal rights bumper stickers say) (Freeman, 2014).

But it is challenging to get people to admit that their routine, legally-sanctioned habits are unethical, as few of us want to think of our society and ourselves as mass murderers of the innocent. Animal advocates then must strategically use communication to deconstruct the

blindness that we humans have built for our own psychic protection, making visible nonhuman animals' individuality, suffering, interest in living freely, and kinship with us (Freeman, 2014). Jacques Derrida (2002) describes us as an animal who is at unease with itself because we deny our own animality. He believes if we make our everyday violence against other animals visible, the discomfort will get us to change because we will not be able to live with the altered image we have of ourselves:

“No one can deny seriously, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves, in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence.” (Derrida 2002, p. 394)

Joy (2010) contends that the solution for this cognitive dissonance of carnists (meat-eaters) is to enable them to see other animals differently – for humans to acknowledge their own resistance to seeing each farmed animal as someone, not just compartmentalizing them as an edible object whose purpose is to be eaten. One way to do this is to take Carol Adams' (1990) advice to avoid “absent referent” terminology that hides the individual who is being eaten behind industry terms such as “meat,” “poultry,” or “pork.” (p. 42). Similarly, Joan Dunayer (2001) recommends that we be more forthright and less euphemistic with our language so we can acknowledge ourselves as being oppressive: “Speciesism is a lie, and it *requires* a language of lies to survive. Currently, our language denies the harm that humans routinely inflict on other animals; linguistically, both the victims and the perpetrators have disappeared” (p. ix). The guidelines for communicators at animalsandmedia.org builds upon these scholars' suggestions to recommend more direct and respectful terminology such as: calling nonhuman animals by their species name (pigs not pork, deer not game, fish not seafood), inserting verbs that describe our actions toward them (i.e. farmed animals, rats used for research, elephants kept in captivity, milk taken from cows), getting their sex correct (he or she, not it), and referring to ourselves as animals (Freeman and Merskin, 2015).

Language is only one part of the process of getting society to see nonhuman animals as persons deserving of their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the way they see humans as persons. In English, the name for a chicken (someone) is the same as the industry

name for her flesh – chicken (something). Farm Sanctuary’s ‘Someone Project’⁵ can help by providing scientific evidence for the cognitive complexities that nonhuman animals possess (particularly farmed animals). But whether we envision someone not something when we hear “chicken” depends not only on knowing birds have feelings, but upon the success of step one – our ability to more humbly view ourselves as fellow animals.

3) Their injuries are indeed primarily our fault (so, only we can save them).

This should be easier to accomplish than the other steps, except for some American conservatives’ denial of anthropogenic climate change. It is obvious enough how we control the lives of domesticated animals; and for free-living/wild animals, there is enough scientific evidence to prove our ecological effects on their habitats as well as psychological and social effects on their lives and families. We just have to communicate these cause-and-effect relationships and encourage the news media to include the interests of nonhuman animals in stories that affect them (Freeman, Bekoff and Bexell, 2010). If human societies recognize the extent of the dominance to which we have subjected nonhuman species (based on the human moral superiority complex that feeds and morally ‘justifies’ a speciesist system), then we logically must acknowledge part of this dominance has been humans maintaining *control over* living beings (and nature, to the extent we can). I mention this because if we are in control of our actions and institutions, then we can change them and logically should be accountable for making that change. Other animals and nature may have agency, but there is only so much they can accomplish in their own liberation and regeneration of ecosystems without our assistance in mitigating our destructive practices and enacting restorative justice as reparations.

In the collective action framing of vegan campaigns, American animal rights activists frame animal agribusiness as the primary problem and guilty party (Freeman, 2014). While seeing “them” not “us” as the problem may be easier for audiences to digest, ultimately, I think our society must see themselves, not industry, as culpable. Whoever is responsible is naturally the most accountable for making changes. If animal rights means an end to industries exploiting animals, our discourse cannot imply that industry must improve, as we will only end up with “welfare” reform to animal (ab)use. Instead, activists must help society recognize that our speciesism and our unjustified human moral superiority is the root of the problem that legally

⁵ See the website at <http://www.farmsanctuary.org/learn/the-someone-project/#>

sanctions and enables the violence of exploitative industries and creates a demand for their animal products (Freeman, 2014).

Rhetorically, we can try to make this accusation palatable by citing our collective responsibility, such as blaming a *speciesist society*, *consumers*, *carnism*, and *us* (not necessarily blaming individuals – *you*). Or sometimes it may be appropriate to be more direct and blunt, acknowledging how we each are individually responsible for hurting animals (through our voting and consumer habits), which is likely out of sync with our self-image as a compassionate and fair person. In my book on vegan advocacy strategies, I suggest we should probably use both direct and indirect messages, “Considering the scale of the mass slaughter, I think it does justify some straightforward expressions of exasperation at society’s complicity in this travesty” (Freeman, 2014, p. 238). Consider Herbivore clothing company’s vegan message “Eat like you give a damn.”

In his critique of visual culture, Randy Malamud (2012) argues that we must admit to ourselves that we are dangerous to fellow animals and nature, yet the unflattering truth of our destructive behavior is cloaked by our expressions of supposed ‘admiration’ for nonhumans through our display of them in zoos and aquaria and our pervasive use of them as symbols, such as sports team mascots. He contends that we are not entitled to see them at our convenience nor to culturally appropriate them as if we are honoring them. The false ecological discourse we willingly swallow in zoos is ultimately counterproductive: “Zoos have the palliative effect of making the public less concerned about threats to animals – less worried about their diminution in nature – because they preserve (token) animals in this archival capacity” (p. 124). We must face the harsh reality that we need to drastically change our over-consumptive lifestyles:

“It may be psychologically soothing to mask the evidence of habitat destruction and extinction that has been escalating exponentially for the past several generations, but it is not ethical to do so. We need to find ways to educate people about animals, and about ecology – ways that tell the truth.” (Malamud, 2012, p. 129)

This lesson can be “that these animals live far from us, are threatened by us, do not want to meet us eye to eye as they are held captive inside a cage” (p. 122). Thus, “we need to stop desecrating their habitats, and make it possible that they can live there” (p. 122). Malamud encourages the “expansion our ecological consciousness” (p. 126), where we proactively learn about each animal in her proper context, appreciate her differences and even her distance from us, and ask

what we can do to keep her and her cohabitants in their natural space, however inaccessible that may be to us.

4) Act upon our values and propose, debate, and enact solutions to save and restore the health and freedom of living beings. Engage in discourse about intervention, both voluntary and regulatory. Model it. As a starting point for intervention on the goal of not farming or hunting animals for food, Joy (2011) advises vegan advocates to engage in compassionate dialogue particularly with “neocarnists” (her term for ‘compassionate carnivores’ or ‘locavores’ who make conscientious consumption choices about which animal products they see as ‘responsibly-sourced’), as these neocarnists have demonstrated a promising step forward in their consciousness about food. Similarly, another target market is youth in general, as most humane and environmental educators as well as vegan outreach groups give presentations and leaflet in the school system. After decades of this youth outreach, it is possible we will have a wave of more socially and ecologically conscious leaders in future years.⁶

What are some possible examples of intervention that we could prioritize?

- Enacting moratoriums on any more exploitative animal facilities; make plans to phase out: animal farming, animal researching, breeding and kidnapping them for entertainment and zoos, fur farming, companion animal breeding and selling, etc. This could involve tax incentives or subsidies for transitions to restorative or responsible businesses, including sustainable and animal-free replacement products and services (see Simon, 2013).
- Conducting nonviolent direct action at sites of exploitation (production end or consumption end). For example, this could include ‘image events,’ such as candle light vigils, protests, flash mobs or theatrical performances, or civil disobedience like sit-ins at: slaughterhouses, butcher shops, research facilities, fur ‘farms’ or retailers, breeding facilities, trapping and hunting spots, taxidermists, etc. This draws public attention and/or disrupts normal business or hunting practices.

⁶ This future is even more likely if we can decrease the influence of corporate lobbying of political leaders and get money out of politics through campaign finance reform, allowing legislators to truly serve the public’s interests.

- Requiring environmental impact statements and endangered species laws (such as used in the United States) that mandate consideration of wilderness and wildlife interests in decision-making prior to any human business development or activity. It should consider the interests of all wildlife, not only those who are endangered, and it must also consider impacts on any indigenous peoples or vulnerable human groups. For these protective policies to be useful, they must be enforced and made invulnerable to political whims.
- Ending our most ecologically destructive practices, such as: animal farming and fishing, war and weapons proliferation, greenhouse gas emissions, and persistent pollution via garbage, chemicals, and plastic products. This would mean making a serious shift to plant based diets and renewable, clean energy sources; manufacturing with non-toxic, biodegradable materials; using and wasting less through repurposing and sharing; and actively championing peaceful conflict resolutions and an end to economic injustices, emphasizing social harmony.
- Making vegan foods the default at major food service sites (airports, schools, prisons, conventions). Animal products, if offered in a transition stage, must be ordered separately as a special meal.
- Ending the genetic modification of life and starting to farm crops organically, being judicious with use of water and land. Labeling/rating food items (or even taxing them) based on their levels of ecological sustainability, to help consumers make informed decisions.
- Reporting animal cruelty and rescuing animals from cruelty and neglect. Rehoming animals or providing sanctuary.
- Ending the domestication of animal species (or what Nibert, 2013, calls “domesecration”) that makes them wholly dependent on humans throughout their lifespan.
- Ending the mass extinction of species through proactive means to restore healthy wildlife habitats and provide wildlife corridors for safe migration, while practicing compassionate conservation rather than hunting-centered “wildlife management.”⁷

⁷ See Edward O. Wilson’s book *Half earth: Our planet’s fight for life* (2016, Liveright Publishing) for a plan to set aside half of the Earth’s surface as natural habitat for wildlife. And find out more about how wildlife conservation efforts can embrace individual animal welfare at The Centre for Compassionate Conservation, based at the University of Technology in Sydney. For ideas on how nonhuman animal and environmental activists can work together, see Lisa

These are tangible and physical actions. But can intervention also be more mental – interrupting people’s perceptions of social norms and their own identity? Wakening them out of complicity to encourage them to end the routine of animal exploitation? Yes. The first three discursive steps I outlined in this chapter suggest ways to help transform our perception of ourselves in relation to other animals. To enact this, we must produce campaigns, investigative reports, and documentaries critical of the status quo discourse, and entertainment programming that tells new, more animal-inclusive stories that showcase a more harmonious future and a view of ourselves as humanimals (Freeman and Merskin, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Through strategic use of discourse in establishing the worth of nonhuman animal persons, establishing humanity’s ethical values, establishing our fault and responsibility for oppressing and killing them, and establishing and enacting solutions to repair the harm we have caused, we ask our species to live up to our self-identity as ethical, caring individuals who fulfill our responsibilities of justice, reparations, beneficence, and non-injury toward fellow animals. The mere act of assuming one has the right to intervene in routine human activities that harm animals (just bringing it up unapologetically) is revolutionary and makes a statement about the worth of nonhuman animals and our wrongness in persistently belittling them as objects for human use. To think of ourselves more humbly as yet another animal on this planet – a humanimal – is revolutionary. In doing so, we should acknowledge our kinship with them while also expressing wonder at their uniqueness and the diversity of nature. I hope humanity gains the audacity to embrace our animality and revolt against our own oppression of animals and nature before it is too late.

Kimmerer’s edited book *Animals and the Environment: Advocacy, Activism, and the Quest for Common Ground* (2015, Routledge).

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