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**DOI**

[10.1177/00471178231191293](https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231191293)

**Publication date**

2023

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

International Relations

**License**

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**Citation for published version (APA):**

Meijer, E. (2023). Global injustice and animals: towards a multispecies social connection model. *International Relations*, 37(3), 497-513. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231191293>

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# Global injustice and animals: towards a multispecies social connection model

International Relations  
2023, Vol. 37(3) 497–513  
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DOI: 10.1177/00471178231191293  
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## Abstract

In this article I argue for and sketch the outlines of a multispecies social connection model, based on the work of Iris Marion Young. This multispecies social connection model responds to shortcomings in existing approaches to multispecies global justice in animal philosophy and IR. Because the model focuses on concrete structures of injustice, it allows for taking into account relations without categorizing other animals beforehand and for being attentive to nonhuman animal agency, and it recognizes the entanglement of political and economic forces in perpetuating injustice towards animals. The multispecies model also brings to light problems with anthropocentrism in theorizing structural injustice and responsibility. Analyzing multispecies structures of injustice shows how different forms of oppression are connected globally, which offers a better view of animal and human oppression than anthropocentric theorizing. This is important for determining the responsibilities of different kinds of social, political, and economic actors in working toward social change, and for knowing what to work toward. This model can either complement existing political models, or function as the starting point for new multispecies politics.

## Keywords

animal philosophy, animal politics, interspecies democracy, multispecies international relations, multispecies social connection model

## Introduction

Human domination of other animals is steadily increasing in nearly all parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, human views of nonhuman animals are changing. New studies in biology and ethology show that other animals have rich inner lives, including

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languages<sup>2</sup> and cultures,<sup>3</sup> and recent work in political philosophy shows that they not only form their own communities, but often actively co-shape communities, habitats, and relations with humans.<sup>4</sup> Both the increased exploitation of nonhuman animals and the changing understanding of their social and political agency have led scholars to move from ethical to political frameworks in thinking about the position of nonhuman animals, interspecies relations, and multispecies relations. This movement matters both theoretically, because scholars in political theory, political philosophy, and related fields have specific conceptual tools to analyze relations between communities, democracy, oppression, justice, and other political phenomena. A move to the political also matters pragmatically, because extending anthropocentric political institutions to include other animals could make an important difference for those animals who are alive today. Because nonhuman animals are not objects to think about, but subjects with their own perspectives on life, their agency needs to be taken into account in formulating multispecies understandings of political concepts and forming new societies.<sup>5</sup> Thinking about multispecies political relations is not only important with regard to other animals. In order to develop more just and sustainable systems and structures, humans need to rethink their position in the greater whole, based on the understanding that human and nonhuman agencies are entangled.<sup>6</sup>

In this article I draw on insights about political animal agency,<sup>7</sup> multispecies politics,<sup>8</sup> and non-anthropocentric approaches to international relations<sup>9</sup> to develop the outlines of a multispecies social connection model. I do so both in response to existing approaches to multispecies global justice in animal philosophy, and to argue for moving beyond the human in social connection theories. Shifting the focus from multispecies global justice to structural injustice provides another lens for looking at multispecies global relations. This type of analysis can either complement existing theoretical approaches, or function as the starting point for forming new political institutions, practices, and structures.<sup>10</sup>

In order to explore this further, I draw on Iris Marion Young's social connection model, which aims to explicate human responsibilities with regard to global structures of injustice.<sup>11</sup> As McKeown writes,<sup>12</sup> structural injustice is a concept with a long history. The origin of the general idea is often associated with Marxism, and attention for structures of injustice is found in many strands of thought like feminism and decolonial theory, but also liberalism. However, in political theory literature it is currently mostly used in relation to the work of Young.<sup>13</sup> Young argues that structural injustice renders individuals vulnerable to domination or oppression in different spheres, which extend beyond nation borders, and the political; economic structures play an important role in perpetuating injustices. An example that Young herself uses to analyze structural injustice is sweatshop labor, another example is colonialism.<sup>14</sup>

The second aim of this paper is to argue that social connection approaches need to move beyond the human. Young's social connection model is widely used and discussed in the literature,<sup>15</sup> but only in relation to humans. Young herself also focuses on injustices toward humans.<sup>16</sup> This focus on the human is problematic because nonhuman animals clearly also experience structural injustice by the hands of humans, which extends globally, and because structures of injustice are often multispecies: they target both humans and other animals simultaneously. A focus on the human also keeps intact the anthropocentrism that led to much of the structural economic and ecological injustices that

animals including humans, are facing worldwide. Furthermore, the category of ‘the human’ in international politics is exclusionary and needs rethinking.<sup>17</sup> We therefore need a *multispecies* social connection model that takes into account injustice toward human and nonhuman animals, and investigates parallels between different forms of injustice. In order to develop this further I use what Claire Jean Kim<sup>18</sup> calls a ‘multi-optic lens’ to analyze intersecting oppressions.

In what follows I first discuss two approaches in animal philosophy toward multispecies justice: Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka’s liberal democratic model of political animal rights,<sup>19</sup> and Alasdair Cochrane’s multispecies cosmopolitanism,<sup>20</sup> and discuss the importance of focusing on injustice. I then draw on Young’s social connection model and Kim’s view of interlocked oppressions, to provide a method of mapping multispecies structures of oppression.<sup>21</sup> In the third section I turn to Young’s views about responsibility in more detail and explore how we can analyze human responsibilities toward other animals (including humans) in the Anthropocene. In the final section, I discuss ways forward and questions for further research, in the context of international relations.

## Two models of multispecies global justice

In their political theory of animal rights,<sup>22</sup> Donaldson and Kymlicka propose to extend liberal democratic principles to include other animals. They argue convincingly that all animals should have universal negative rights, such as the right not to be killed, and that is not enough to establish justice for them. They draw attention to the fact that different groups of animals relate differently to human political communities, which matters for determining rights and duties. They distinguish between domesticated animals who are part of shared interspecies communities, and wild or liminal animals who form their own sovereign communities. Animals from the first group, like dogs, pigs, and chickens should be seen as co-citizens. Wild animals who prefer to stay away from humans and do not depend on them, like hares or deer, should be seen as independent sovereign communities. Animals who are not domesticated but live in close proximity to humans, like rats or city pigeons, should be awarded denizenship, which includes right to a habitat and against harms. In this model, human obligations of justice are stronger toward those who are part of the same political community, than toward others. Donaldson and Kymlicka recognize that nonhuman animals are not passive recipients of care or harm but active agents, who may co-shape relations with humans, or act in response to human oppression, for example by resisting, fleeing, or ignoring humans, individually or as communities.

Donaldson and Kymlicka’s citizenship approach led to criticism from cosmopolitan thinkers.<sup>23,24</sup> Zoocosmopolitans argue that all sentient animals should have equal political rights and standing, based on their interests and not membership of a pre-existing multispecies political community.<sup>25</sup> Different cosmopolitans conceptualize multispecies justice in different ways, I will here focus on Alasdair Cochrane’s multispecies cosmopolitanism. Cochrane argues for a ‘sentientist cosmopolitan democracy’ in which the rights and duties of sentient beings are not tied to membership of a specific community. Instead, he follows the principle that the interests of all (sentient) animals who are affected by a decision should be included in making that decision.<sup>26</sup> This for example has

consequences for duties of justice that humans have toward wild animals.<sup>27</sup> Many wild animals are affected by human political decision-making, which Donaldson and Kymlicka recognize. However, they argue that because they are autonomous communities, human assistance should be limited to repairing harms and in certain cases humanitarian assistance (which already may have far reaching consequences for how we share the land with others). Cochrane however argues for positive rights for wild animals, for example with regard to health care or intervening in predation, and sees them as part of the same global community as humans.

Both Donaldson and Kymlicka's zooliberal model and Cochrane's cosmopolitan model would be in favor of universal rights for animals, such as the right not to be killed, held captive, or exploited and would thus mean the end of industrial exploitation of animals. However, their interpretations of the next phase differ. Extending liberal democratic institutions and practices to include other animals would mean that cows, chickens, and domesticated animals would be regarded as full members of shared political communities, and would have not only the right to be represented politically, but also to exercise democratic agency. Wild animal communities, such as the meadow birds who live in pastures, would have a right to the land they live on and a right to be protected from direct harms by humans as well as indirect harms, including rights of protection from spillover effects of new human industries. The same would apply to wild animal communities elsewhere, for example, if they would be affected by pollution. In the zoo-cosmopolitan model, the boundaries of political communities would need to be redrawn more extensively, so that they would encompass all who are affected by their decision making. Extending positive rights to wild animals could improve their lives, but when it would also lead to more intervention, as in the case of health care and decreasing predation, it could also increase human domination of them.<sup>28</sup>

Both positions raise valuable points. As the citizenship approach shows, relations affect obligations, and historical injustices such as domestication lead to specific duties on the side of humans. Domestication also affects the level of deliberation that is possible and desirable between human communities and nonhuman animals, though I do want to note that interaction with non-domesticated animals on the basis of freedom and trust is also possible.<sup>29</sup> From the perspective of animal agency and co-shaping communities, there are clear differences between chickens, herons, and albatrosses, and the citizenship model captures some of our intuitions about political engagement with these groups.

At the same time, political membership is historically contingent, and it is not always fair, or deserved. In the context of the Anthropocene, humans have strong duties toward many other animals because of their impact on their lives that cannot be captured neatly by the citizenship model. The focus on equality, and the all-affected principle, in Cochrane's zoocosmopolitan model might be better suited to conceptualize this. A related point is that there is a wide range of existing and possible relations within the categories Donaldson and Kymlicka describe. Horses may have more in common with deer than with hamsters, in terms of capabilities and future preferences with regard to relations with humans. Relations are not fixed historically: when humans begin to act better, domesticated animals might choose to become liminal, and wild animal communities may too.

### *Moving from justice to injustice*

Apart from the problems discussed above, the models also share shortcomings. I will here focus on two. The first is their focus on political justice. As scholars in the field of critical animal studies and critical theory more broadly have showed, animal exploitation and destruction of the natural world is for a large part driven by capitalism, and conceptualizing change also requires investigating how political and economic forces relate. Political and economic oppression of animals is upheld by epistemic oppression, which is ingrained in our culture, knowledge structures, and discourses. This affects not only how we consider animals, but also how we think about concepts (that were usually constructed by excluding other animals) and knowledge formation more generally. This leads me to my second point. In both models, humans define the best (or most just) way of living together politically with other animals, which is problematic with regard to their agency and right to self-determination. While this may not be avoided completely, given the current human dominance of other animals, it is something to be careful with in theorizing.

Shifting the focus from multispecies justice to multispecies injustice can bring to light how different forms of oppression are connected in concrete situations, and can help to determine the obligations of different kinds of actors, including companies. It also offers a way of taking into account relations but avoiding categorization as humans. Mapping injustices does not ask for defining animal capacities, communities, or interspecies relations beforehand, but instead starts with existing interactions and works from the ground up. In many cases we do not know the scope of animal capacities and interests, precisely because of structural injustice in existing relations. This is for example visible in the concept ‘sentience’, which is central to Cochrane’s approach. Who is seen as sentient by humans has changed extensively throughout the past decades, and while it was long reserved for mammals, birds and reptiles, now the concept is used for others too, like bees,<sup>30</sup> and even plants.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, human understandings about animal cultures and communities are changing fast, which has implications for how we think about political multispecies relations between human and nonhuman animal communities. Human empirical and normative claims about nonhuman animals often follow from historic and current epistemic and material oppression. In animal science for example, human researchers tend to reinforce stereotypical views about the animals they study and do not work from a neutral position.<sup>32</sup> Humans do not have and will never have a view from nowhere, and human systems tend to favor humans.

A focus on existing structures of injustice might have the further benefit of speaking to human responsibilities in a different way than appealing to an ideal of justice, as I will discuss in more detail in below. This matters especially in times of climate crisis, because the ecological and political questions at stake seem too large to tackle, leading to what Donna Haraway calls a ‘game over’<sup>33</sup> attitude. A focus on concrete injustice may mobilize political agency.

Mapping existing relations of injustice is only part of working toward a better multispecies future. It should go hand in hand with collaborating with nonhuman animals to build new, more just societies.<sup>34</sup> As I mentioned above, the multispecies social connection model can complement existing approaches toward multispecies global justice,

by offering a method of analysis that is situated and relational, and embedded in real world politics. But it can also support moving toward new models, such as multispecies anarchism.

## Multispecies structural injustice

Before we can map the structural injustices springing from multispecies social relations, we need to take a closer look at what social structures are and what role they play in Young's social connection model. Young draws upon insights from social theory to develop a view of social structures that aims to do justice to individual agency as well as historical power relations. Structures in general encompass: 'institutional rules and interactive routines, mobilization of resources and physical structures like buildings and roads'.<sup>35</sup> Social structures provide historical givens that are relatively stable over time, and are the background for actions of individuals. They form options for choice, and enable or constrain actions. Actors occupy different positions in social space, and social structures constitute the connections among positions and relationships. Because of historical and present injustice and inequality, social structures might lead to unequal opportunities and benefits. While individuals and collectives have agency in choosing to reproduce structures or not, their acts are always shaped by socio-historical conditions. Furthermore, because different actors contribute to social processes, in the context of social change good intentions might not always lead to good collective results.

Humans are not the only agents that affect social structures: nonhuman animals and other beings, such as plants,<sup>36</sup> also exercise agency and actively contribute to and/or shape relationships with others, including social and political relations.<sup>37</sup> While Young's model focuses on human moral and political agency, it can be useful for thinking about animals and social structures too, precisely because she emphasizes the interplay between structure and agency.<sup>38</sup> Nonhuman animals too shape and are shaped by the social world of which they are part, which may be formed predominantly by multispecies and interspecies social structures, as for domesticated animals, or intraspecies social structures, in the case of wild animals.<sup>39</sup> As I will discuss in more detail in the next section, there is an imbalance of power between humans and other animals and there are differences in shaping structural injustice, which affects questions of responsibility, but this does not erase the fact that nonhuman animals are social and political agents too.

According to Young, structural injustice occurs when 'social processes put large categories of persons under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time as these processes enable others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities'.<sup>40</sup> Young draws attention to the fact that the kind of moral wrong that we encounter here is not the same as a wrong that is enacted by an individual actor, or that follows from a wrong constituted by state policies. Rather, it follows from how individuals and institutions act within a structure of given norms and institutional rules. Everyone who participates in this process is responsible for it, when they perpetuate the ongoing practices of cooperation that hold up the structure. But this does not mean that they willfully brought about the results of the process, or are responsible for the shape of the

process itself. This is also the intuition of many citizens: unjust structures are bad and exploitative practices should end, but we cannot change them singlehandedly, and our acts may also have unintended consequences. Structures of injustice do not end at state borders, as is visible in the example of sweatshop labor that Young discusses.<sup>41</sup>

The sweatshop example bears strong similarities to animal agriculture. In the example of Dutch animal agriculture, citizens, companies, and certain politicians profit from a structure that puts indigenous communities in Brazil ‘under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities’. Global chains of production connect Dutch animal farming to deforestation in the Amazon for soy.<sup>42</sup> Over 95% of the soy that is produced in the Amazon is used for animal food. The Netherlands is the second biggest importer of Brazilian soy, after China.<sup>43</sup> In fact, cheap soy from Brazil is one of the foundations of Dutch animal agriculture because paying more for animal food would affect how much profit is made. In order to produce cheap soy, rainforests and other ecosystems are destroyed, and these are the habitats of human indigenous communities.<sup>44</sup>

Structural injustices are also found in relation to other animals. Similar to human indigenous communities, wild animal communities lose their homes in the Amazon through deforestation. In the Netherlands itself, 500 million land animals are bred for food yearly, and 1.7 million are slaughtered daily.<sup>45</sup> The Netherlands has the highest livestock density in the world. The export of animal products (such as ‘meat’, animal milk, and animal cheese) is high. Millions of living animals are exported yearly, often on long transports without enough food and water (*ibid.*). In addition to direct exploitation, industrial farming practices are also responsible for pollution of air and soil, zoonoses, and loss of biodiversity, which affects humans and nonhumans.<sup>46</sup>

Young writes that working toward abolishing unjust structures is demanding. It might seem as if this problem is magnified by including the other animals. However, human and nonhuman oppressions are very often interconnected, and cannot be addressed separately materially or conceptually.<sup>47</sup> Many forms of human oppression animalize humans or constitute interlocked interspecies oppressions, which requires attending to animalization and animal oppression. Similarly, to adequately understand oppression of animal groups we need to consider how they relate to constructions of ‘the human’ as well as to material forms of oppression of humans.

### *Connecting oppressions*

Claire Jean Kim<sup>48</sup> writes that we need to develop a ‘multi-optic lens’ in order to adequately assess situations in which human and animal oppression is intertwined. This means a lens that does not reduce one form of oppression to another, and recognizes multidimensionality of power working in interhuman and interspecies relations. Kim argues that categories of difference, such as species, race, or gender, are not biological or natural givens. Rather, they are historical-social constructions that are produced interdependently through power relations.<sup>49</sup> Forms of domination often cannot be separated easily, because they inform each other dynamically; Kim writes that they are ‘synergistically related’. Often, when analyzing violence, scholars use a single-optic lens, meaning that they choose one form of oppression that they see as ontologically or



morally foundational. Kim's multi-optic vision takes into account different perspectives simultaneously in order to do justice to the existence of different group experiences of oppression as well as their interconnectedness. While it is difficult to take into account webs of relations, and not focus on single ones, this is the only way, Kim writes, to overcome structures of domination.

In the example of Dutch agriculture that I just described, only considering animal exploitation, without taking into account exploitation of the land or human workers would paint a one-sided picture. Similarly, only considering human exploitation leaves intact violence toward other animals, and for theorizing the lower status of animals in society it is also important to also look at human marginalized groups. An example is the position of Dutch slaughterhouse workers, who are exploited in the same industry as the animals, and whose interests are disregarded too, in a structure that favors profit above lives.<sup>50</sup> This became clear during the Covid-19 pandemic, when there were several big outbreaks of Covid in slaughterhouses in the Netherlands. Companies were reluctant to improve working conditions, which exposed structural problems with workers, often immigrants from Eastern Europe, and put them at risk.<sup>51</sup>

In the case of slaughterhouses, deforestation in Brazil, air pollution, and other areas where the oppression of animals and marginalized humans connect, capitalism is reinforced by anthropocentrism. The commodification of animals is legitimized by anthropocentrism, but animals are not the only ones affected. While animal exploitation generally benefits humans, different groups of humans also suffer from hierarchies that follow from the anthropocentric logic. For example, indigenous groups of humans have historically been animalized,<sup>52</sup> which makes it easier to disregard their interests.

The fact that certain humans also suffer from anthropocentrism, and from multispecies structural oppression, nuances the idea that 'humans' are responsible for animal exploitation. There is however an imbalance of power. As Burke writes: '*Homo sapiens* possesses a physical and legal power far beyond that of all other species, whether individually or in their totality: the power to kill, influence, terraform, dominate, degrade, and depopulate the Earth at a planetary scale'.<sup>53</sup> This human power is visible in many acts and institutions, of corporations and policymakers, in food and transport systems, and reflected in laws. This leads us to the question of responsibility.

## Human responsibilities and social connections

Many human citizens already feel responsible for injustice beyond the borders of their own nations. This is for example expressed in consumers' boycotts of products that involve exploitation of humans and other animals in another part of the world, such as the recent boycotts of palm oil,<sup>54</sup> or in the assistance of wild animal communities and individuals who are not part of multispecies communities involving humans by wildlife rehabilitation centers. Yet it is often unclear who is responsible for what with regard to structural injustice in multispecies international relations, and what responsibility entails precisely. Because the interests of other animals, plants, and ecosystems are not adequately represented in legal and political systems, it is easy for citizens, companies, and politicians to not take responsibility. Young draws attention to the fact that the legal way of thinking about responsibility is often insufficient for thinking about responsibility in relation to structural injustice.

In the social connection model of responsibility, all who contribute to the structural processes that produce injustice by their actions, have responsibilities to work to resolve these injustices. In order to spell out what this entails, Young contrasts her model with the traditional way of thinking about responsibility, which she calls the liability model. In the liability model, thinking about addressing injustice and harm is focused on deeds in the past, with one perpetrator, that can be either an individual or a group or state. Young argues that this model is not suitable for dealing with structural injustices, because there is not one perpetrator, and a backward-looking model is not sufficient. Structural injustices are ongoing processes to which different actors contribute, who alone cannot determine the outcomes, and change requires collective action. This works as follows. In social structures actors are usually not responsible for causing injustice in the legal sense. But if they participate in transnational institutional processes producing structural injustice, they are responsible for acting in a morally appropriate way, which is connected to aiming for more just outcomes. Different actors have different responsibilities with regard to structural injustices, related to their position of power within the structure.

Young describes different features of this model of responsibility. In structures of injustice, we cannot isolate perpetrators and different actors are involved in different ways. For example, the consumer of cow milk has a different position in the social scheme than the farmer who exploits the cow, the slaughterhouse worker who kills her, or the director of Campina, the biggest dairy company in the Netherlands. We also cannot draw upon the law to articulate the harms done fully: structural injustices are weaved into accepted schemes of norms and institutions. This is very clear in the multispecies context: both the exploitation of certain groups of humans in different geographical regions, and animal exploitation within and beyond nation states, is accepted practice; in our example exploiting and killing cows is legal. In working toward justice, the whole system should therefore be taken into account, including unforeseen outcomes or harmful side effects of accepted practices, such as nitrogen pollution. This is a forward-looking process, according to Young: instead of seeking justice for past harms, we should understand that we are currently implicit in ongoing processes that will continue to generate harms unless we intervene. Responsibility for intervening is shared between actors, and because of that it requires collective action. We find this to be true in the case of dealing with nonhuman animals as well. While there is a need to remedy historical injustices toward nonhuman animal individuals and communities, the focus right now needs to be on improving life in the present and future.<sup>55</sup> In the example of animal agriculture, states, companies, and citizens are benefiting from exploiting others, and should collectively intervene and act otherwise.

It is important to note that some of the actors involved in perpetuating these processes are also victims. Young discusses how sweatshop workers and owners of small companies are exploited, but also choose to perpetuate their exploitation and/or the exploitation of others, for economic or other reasons. This is true for certain farmers and slaughterhouse workers in the Netherlands too. While they may be disadvantaged by the social structures that constitute the current system of agriculture, they also contribute to the exploitation and killing of others, and often have some scope<sup>56</sup> to choose differently – they can move to vegan farming, or work for other companies. In contrast, the animals

involved usually have no chance of changing their situation, and do not oppress others, at least not in the structural sense described by Young. They also have no or very limited options for addressing the harms done to them. While they might resist in different ways – farmed animals may escape or fight, wild animals might leave and vote with their feet<sup>57</sup> – they cannot change the structures of injustice.

Stating that victims sometimes also contribute to unjust structures has led to criticism in the secondary literature about the social connection model. Gould calls it the ‘victim blaming objection’<sup>58</sup> to the social connection model. But as McKeown writes, for Young this follows from recognizing the agency of oppressed groups, which matters both epistemically, because victims know most about the harms they suffer, and politically, because it is part of recognizing their agency in ongoing processes of change. In the context of multispecies structural injustice, thinking about animals and victimhood requires more research, but the model of overlapping oppressions does show that being a victim and having voice are not a matter of all or nothing, but rather of degree.

This way of thinking about responsibility offers a way of recognizing how different agents co-produce ongoing injustice that is intuitively appealing – in the context of animal exploitation many different agents contribute to and keep intact the status quo. It also explains why changing this kind of injustice is so difficult, because it shows the dynamic interconnections between economic and cultural processes and social and political institutions. The model rightly appeals to individual responsibility while taking into account structural dimensions too. But the model also raises questions, for example about how to understand differences in responsibility for different kinds of agents, such as individual humans and collectives, companies, and states, about different uses of the term responsibility, and about how the relation between moral and political responsibility and agency.<sup>59</sup> For Young, these questions have to be answered democratically, through deliberation and collective action.

### *Changing structures of injustice*

I agree with Young that further determining responsibilities for structural injustice and working toward change requires public communicative engagement. Young rightly writes that in this process, agents who share responsibility with others, who may be differently situated, have to cooperate. Because their interests will often vary, this includes struggle and challenging one another. Actors are connected through a multitude of economic and social processes across nations, and therefore determining responsibilities asks for different kinds of action. Working toward change might involve state institutions, but effective collective action can also take place beyond these, and may include consumer’s boycotts, street demonstrations, academic work, and journalism. Many structures of injustice go unnoticed because they are perceived as normal, and so changing them is intertwined with exposing them as injustice.

We already find communicative engagement of this sort in different spheres of interaction with regard to animal oppression and multispecies structures of injustice. For example, in parliamentary politics there is a rise of animal parties worldwide, who work toward change for all beings, and educate citizens and fellow politicians in the process.<sup>60</sup> Different NGO’s show how certain structures are harmful, and offer alternatives.<sup>61</sup> In the climate marches beginning in 2019, young people took to the streets in different cities

across the world, and explicitly emphasized the connections between animal exploitation, the climate crisis, and deforestation. Animal rights organizations also increasingly point to connections between human and nonhuman animal oppression, as well as links between animal exploitation and the climate crisis. Newspapers and other media report on harms done to animals and the natural world; artists, writers, and film makers do the same and sometimes offer alternatives. With regard to exposing injustice, activism plays an important role. Many activists have relatively little power and privilege, but they can sometimes influence the general public or politicians. Nonhuman animals have even less power and privilege, but sometimes do contribute to a change in discourse, for example when farmed animals manage to make headlines by escaping on their way to slaughter, or when their stories are told by writers or film makers.

Still, the more powerful parties remain quiet. Young writes that the responsibilities of actors depend on their collective ability, power, privilege, and interest in the situation. Companies have a much larger responsibility to change structural injustice than human children, and politicians than individual workers. Companies and certain politicians however benefit from keeping intact the status quo, and they are reluctant to change. Disentangling corporate and democratic interests is therefore also part of working toward multispecies justice. Recent proposals to change the democratic process with regard to decision-making about climate change and related ecological crises, such as using citizens' assemblies, may be a good first step.<sup>62</sup>

Better understanding multispecies structures of injustice, taking responsibility, and working toward change should also involve listening to animals and taking seriously multispecies deliberation.<sup>63</sup> Humans can grasp certain harms to nonhuman animals more easily than others. For example, undercover footage that exposes abuse in slaughterhouses is usually understood as violence by the general public. But the daily killing of animals in slaughterhouses is not seen as such, in part because humans do not see the harm in killing animals, due to epistemic violence that separates humans from other animals, but also because humans do not take the animals' perspectives. For that reason many other forms of harm in animal agriculture go unnoticed, such as breaking up friendships and bonds between family members, and preventing the formation or conservation of animal cultures. Speaking with the animals themselves about this under non-violent circumstances matters because they have a right to speak, and it can also help other humans to see structures of injustice more clearly.<sup>64</sup> In processes of multispecies deliberation, the interests of certain groups of humans and certain groups of animals may overlap, as in the case of indigenous human and nonhuman communities in the Amazon, or clash, as in the case of farmers and farmed animals. Species membership does not determine one's social position. Finally, while including the voices of other animals in processes of deliberation is necessary for reasons of justice, it will also make deliberative processes more demanding.

## **Multispecies social connections and moving beyond injustice: concluding remarks and directions for further research**

Rethinking concepts such as politics, justice, and democracy in a multispecies way asks for critically investigating the power relations that shaped them, and for a different kind

of engagement with nonhuman actors. In the academic literature, the scope of concepts such as ‘justice’ and ‘politics’ is historically contingent, and often follows power structures in society. For example, as Havercroft<sup>65</sup> writes, there have long been injustices in the global justice literature because there was not enough attention for the influence of colonialism and racism on concepts such as the state or international politics. The same is true for the more-than-human: Burke draws attention to the fact that ‘world politics, as both a disciplinary field and set of institutional practices, is deeply anthropocentric and Earth-blind’,<sup>66</sup> even in the areas of areas of climate and environmental governance. Tracing existing injustices can help us move beyond idealistic interpretations of concepts, and attending to actual practices of injustice can help us see the agency of those involved, which should be the starting point for acting otherwise.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout this text I have referred to animal agriculture as an example of multispecies structural injustice. There are many other global phenomena that are shaped by structural injustice which affects not only humans but also other animals, such as the climate crisis, or the Covid-19 pandemic. Mapping multispecies structural injustice is necessary to get a better view of what is at stake for whom in these cases, and for knowing how to act. In the example of the climate crisis or the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clearly insufficient to only analyze human oppression, because of the nonhuman agents involved, but scholars using social connection models should in general not standardly exclude other animals from their analysis beforehand, for epistemic and moral reasons.

Many of the concepts that I have discussed above, like ‘social structures’ or ‘responsibility’, deserve a more thorough discussion with regard to nonhuman animals and multispecies relations than I could provide here. I for example did not address the responsibility of nonhuman animals in social relations in enough detail, and it would also be worth contrasting Young’s view of agency and social relations with recent theoretical approaches that decenter human agency and foreground relations between humans and nonhumans, such as Actor-Network Theory and new materialism. Another question concerns institutions. While the social connection model brings to light the inadequacy of existing legal and political institutions in establishing justice, in the case of nonhuman animals there is almost no such protection to rely on, which affects how we can work toward social change, and the content of what we strive for.

### *Directions for further research*

Further developing a multispecies social connection model therefore needs research in different fields. Part of this research is conceptual: scholars working on structural injustice should address human bias in their work, and further develop the concepts at stake non-anthropocentrically, also to be able to see human oppression more clearly. Existing scholarship in animal philosophy and critical animal studies offers many entry points for this project. Another part of this research is empirical. Mapping multispecies structures of injustice asks for more empirical research, such as the effect of different types of industries upon the environment and their contribution to the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity, as well as their effects on animal lives, habitats, cultures, and opportunities for other animals to thrive as communities. To get a better view of nonhuman animal agency in social structures, we also need more non-invasive and intersubjective

ethological and biological research into animals' perspectives, including more research about the effects of PTSS in wild animals, animal language, animal communities and cultures, and options for diplomacy and communications across nations.

While this asks for research in different fields – ranging from biology to economy – the field of International Relations has an important part to play in further understanding multispecies structural injustice and developing methods and models to overcome it. In addition to deconstructing human global politics, there is also a need to further think about international relations and different sorts of animal communities. There are huge differences between how animal communities are organized, how they relate to territory, and how they relate to human nations and other political structures. Their political structures may bear a family resemblance to human political structures, as in the case of bee deliberation, or might be very different. How these communities relate to one another and to human communities and nations is a question that is currently underexplored in the literature.<sup>68</sup> Investigating this further might also ask for establishing new fields, such as political ethology.

Addressing the major problems of our era asks not only for developing better forms of research or new institutions. It also asks for redefining what it means to be human.<sup>69</sup> In learning to live otherwise, other animals can teach us about sustainable ways of living and sharing the world more justly with others. While it might be too late to stop large-scale ecological collapse, there are many worlds in this world that we can care for, and it is time that we join the other animals in doing so.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Joana Castro Pereira for helpful literature suggestions and comments on this article, and to her and Judith Renner for editing this special issue. I also want to thank the two anonymous reviewers, whose generous feedback greatly helped me to improve this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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## Notes

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18. Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
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  26. Cochrane, *Sentientist Politics*.
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  34. Meijer, *When Animals Speak*.
  35. Young, 'Responsibility and Global Justice', p. 111.
  36. Fishel, 'The Global Tree'.
  37. Meijer, *When Animals Speak*.
  38. A full analysis of Young's account of social structures in a multispecies context falls outside of the scope of this paper. My aim here is not to endorse this vision of social structures per se but to investigate how it sheds light on animal and multispecies oppressions.
  39. See for example Jessica Bell Rizzolo and Gay Bradshaw, 'Nonhuman Animal Nations: Transforming Conservation into Wildlife Self-Determination,' *Society & Animals*, 29(4), 2019, pp. 393–413. For how this works in the case of elephants.
  40. Young, 'Responsibility and Global Justice', p. 114.
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54. Crary and Gruen, *Animal Crisis*.
55. For reasons of space, I will not take up the question of reparations for historical injustice here, but these could include habitat restoration and giving land back to animal communities.
56. Or a lot of scope: in 2021 42% of the Dutch farmers were millionaires, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2023/17/in-2021-weer-meer-miljonairs> (accessed 27 July 2023).
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- Democracy: Political Listening to Fellow Citizens and Other Beings', *The Philosopher*, 111(1), 2023, pp. 53–61; for multispecies deliberation see Meijer, *When Animals Speak* (Chapter 9).
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  65. Jonathan Havercroft, 'The Injustices of Global Justice Scholarship', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 22(1), 2023, pp. 161–70. DOI: 10.1177/14748851211000604
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  67. A good example of this in theory is the work of Jason Hribal on animal resistance, and the work done in multispecies communities in animal sanctuaries, such as VINE Sanctuary in Vermont.
  68. An important exception is the work of Rafi Youatt, see for example Youatt, *Interspecies Politics*.
  69. See also Fishel, 'The Global Tree'. about what it means to be human in the Anthropocene.

### Author biography

Eva Meijer is a philosopher and writer. She works as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam (NL), in a 4-year research project *The politics of (not) eating animals*, supported by a Veni grant from the Dutch Research Council, and at Wageningen University and Research (NL) in the project *Anthropocene ethics: Taking animal agency seriously*. She is the chair of the Dutch study group for Animal Philosophy. Recent publications include *When animals speak. Toward an Interspecies Democracy* (NYU Press 2019) and *Animal Languages* (John Murray 2019). Meijer has written 15 books, fiction and non-fiction, and her work has been translated into over 20 languages.