**Nonhuman animals as invisible stakeholders – interspecies diversity management and CSR[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The scientific discourse taking place in business ethics, CSR research and diversity management has traditionally allowed interdisciplinary inspiration, often stemming from philosophy in general and from ethics more specifically. Claims from normative ethics calling for the mitigation of unjust treatment of certain stigmatized, oppressed, and vulnerable groups have been heard, taken into account, and often adopted. What has not yet been discussed (in depth) in the scientific discourses taking place in business ethics, CSR research, and diversity management, however, is the normative question of what kind of moral consideration nonhuman animals ought to receive and why. This is remarkable, considering that nonhuman animals who have been a part of industries are sentient beings who can experience joy and suffering. As “invisible stakeholders”, they are very much affected by business decisions; oftentimes, their wellbeing and, more drastically, their lives depend on them. So why have their voices not been listened to?

The way humans treat nonhuman animals has been sharply criticized in the scientific discipline of animal ethics (and rightly so). If one sheds light on the suffering that nonhuman animals endure in industry and business settings, moral struggles and conflict tend to emerge. Are we justified in treating nonhuman animals the way we do in order to make a profit? Animal ethicists point to humanity’s speciesism as a reason why we treat nonhuman animals as terribly as we do. Speciesism is defined as “the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to a certain species”. (Horta 2010, 1) The fact that nonhuman animals’ needs and interests have not been properly taken into account in business contexts is due to the anthropocentric way of thinking that we humans exhibit, our group-egoism, our speciesism. This phenomenon has primarily been studied by philosophers and psychologists. However, the time is ripe that it also enters the discourse taking place in other scientific disciplines.

“[T]he lack of impetus for institutional change in the case of animal rights might be partly due to speciesism (Singer, 2009). This is plausible given evidence that speciesism exists as not just a philosophical concept but also as a psychological construct, namely ‘the assignment of different moral worth based on species membership’ (Caviola et al., 2018).” (Reese 2020, 6)

It becomes clear that we suffer from many ethical shortcomings that we can only try to rid ourselves from one step at a time. Encouragingly, we’ve made great progress. We’ve understood that sexism, racism, lookism, ableism, and ageism, (among others) are unjust forms of discrimination that we need to eradicate. The question, however, is if we’re able to start eliminating speciesism more and more in order to decrease the unjust violence and suffering that nonhuman beings endure at the hands of humans.

Despite the fact that it’s not necessary and often also has detrimental effects on human health (cf. Melina et al. 2016, Bradbury et al. 2019, McCann et al. 2017)), eating nonhuman animals and their bodily products is a global institution. Joy (2014) coined the term “carnism” for the invisible belief system that conditions us to eat certain animals and their bodily products. Appalled by the suffering and injustice pervasive in the industries (ab)using nonhuman animals, around the world individual and more collective agents (such as NGOs) have engaged in institutional work in order to bring about institutional change. Fostering institutional apprehension is key to bringing about institutional change. (McCarthy & Moon 2018) Those engaging in institutional work in this area have tried to promote change and progress with campaigns, protests, educational outreach, lobbying, and other means. Individuals who choose a vegan diet for ethical reasons practice everyday resistance. (Veron 2016) Institutional work aimed at institutional disruption is therefore also in this case not restricted to public settings, but perfuses into domestic domains.

Despite the fact that nonhuman animals have largely remained invisible in stakeholder analyses, for example, there has been a certain awareness among business professionals that it’s better to minimize the suffering of nonhuman animals caused by their businesses, or at least make it look as if they did. Similar to efforts that can be categorized as window dressing such as greenwashing (environment), or bluewashing (human rights) (cf. for example Banerjee 2014, 7), “humanewashing” is common in the animal industry. Producers are aware that consumers tend to buy more of a product if they are under the impression that the nonhuman animals involved in producing the product were treated “well”.

The aim of this contribution is to illuminate ethical blind spots, spark discussion about (anti-)speciesism, and add to the discourse the missing voices of nonhuman animals. In this conceptual contribution, a theoretical argumentation is offered by discussing arguments why nonhuman animals ought to be considered as stakeholders and why speciesism is a form of discrimination that we should be aware of and reduce in order to be able to grow morally.

Given that the societies we live and work in tend to be speciesist, it is a considerable challenge to overcome speciesism and turn nonhuman animals into *visible* stakeholders. When trying to tackle this challenge, we are well-advised to expect individual and institutional resistance and inertia. In order to overcome these step by step, we need to make a conscious effort to reduce biases and discrimination of all kinds in our academic conversation. (Cf. McJetters 2014: “[C]onstructive dialogue is the only way we can ever heal systemic injustice.”)

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**Autobiographical note**

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In her current research, she analyzes the emerging category of cultured animal products with a focus on cultural, institutional, and organizational change. She has presented her work at diverse international conferences and has also contributed to public discourse with talks in non-​academic settings. She has spent several months as a visiting researcher at Georgetown University (Washington D.C.) and Princeton University. She’s also a psychotherapist in training.

1. In this contribution, the term “stakeholder” is understood in the sense of Freeman’s (Freeman 1984, 46) definition of a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives”. Additionally, the reflections presented in this contribution take Carroll’s (Carroll 1999) definition of CSR as a starting point. (“CSR (…) is often defined as a business’s responsibility for its economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic activities.” (Grosser 2009, 292)) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)