

## Beyond complicity and denial:

### Nonhuman animal advocacy and the right to live justly<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

In discussions about humans' most basic entitlements as members of a moral and political community, academics and laypersons alike often reach for terms that describe what is necessary to live well as an individual who happens to be entangled with other individuals. As social animals, humans require goods more complex and diverse than the basic necessities to sustain life such as food, shelter, and health care; living well also requires, for instance, a sense of security and belonging, freedom of association, and opportunities for education with social, intellectual, and economic ends. Human needs for living well often involve others, from those with whom we have intimate and familial relationships, to those who, far more distant, help form our cultural and political networks. In human rights discourse, however, these needs are typically characterized in terms of the individual rights to have one's own *self-regarding* choices and needs, as a unique and complex embodied subject, respected and/or fulfilled. Far more rarely discussed is what humans require to live morally good lives, or what harms will befall individuals who are not granted access to those requirements.

The claims in this chapter derive from a simple observation about the harms to which we are susceptible as moral agents and citizens, and how these harms are relevant to advocacy movements on behalf of the oppressed and exploited. The observation is that we are equally vulnerable to circumstances in which we cannot live morally well—that is, live (at least) just and reflective lives—and those circumstances in which we cannot live well for ourselves. In the context of an interdependent interspecies community, moral duties are not merely externally imposed requirements but also genuine needs; it is good *for* humans (and other social animals) that we are able to fulfill our duties and be good citizens—in fact our flourishing depends on

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freedom from systematic constraint in this regard. So follows our call for a more robust appreciation of, and normative response to, this particular form of vulnerability. For the nonhuman animal rights movement, we argue, a desirable response would involve a shift in focus toward identifying, and where possible dismantling, the mechanisms by which our faculties to resist the exploitation of nonhumans and develop positive relationships with them are systematically degraded and subverted.

In line with scholars such as Kari Norgaard (2006, 2011) who challenge the “information deficit” model of social change, which holds industry and government transparency combined with public education as the key to political progress, we suggest that the barriers to collectively recognizing and repairing the injustices committed against nonhuman animals are products of more insidious cognitive, emotional, and institutional features of social and political life. These features both harm and wrong community members insofar as they render us complicit in oppressive attitudes and practices. Explicit attention to them will help to show that a singularly duty-focused approach to nonhuman animal rights theory and advocacy hinders the realization of interspecies justice.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, we contend that the duty-centred approach must be augmented by a focus on what we propose as the right of all citizens not to be perpetrators. In the first section, we introduce our formulation of the right not to be a perpetrator of interspecies injustices by bringing together two theorists—Ariella Azoulay and Julia Annas—concerned with the significance of and proper response to unjust and morally compromising circumstances. In the second section, we examine the specific ways in which our attentiveness and receptivity to nonhuman animal suffering and exploitation are systematically contorted and impoverished. We establish the normative and political significance of the habits and identities which shape the social consumption of animal products, and thus the nature of public complicity: these factors threaten the coherence and feasible exercise of fulfilling our obligations to other species, and so imperil our own right not to be perpetrators. In the final section, we explore the implications of our normative perspective shift for interspecies ethics and advocacy. Addressing two potential objections to our emphasis on the rights of perpetrators themselves, we argue that the prevailing

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<sup>2</sup> This is an issue of framing rather than of content. It is not that accounts of what we (and others) are entitled to in order to live well definitionally exclude entitlements to live morally well; it is rather that the focus on reciprocal entitlements deriving from self-interest narrowly construed has overshadowed those deriving from concern for others.

duty-centric emphasis of ethics and advocacy may foreclose opportunities for open, good faith dialogue between nonhuman animal rights proponents and “mainstream” academics and publics. Without sustained attention to the particular vulnerabilities of those complicit in systematic harms against other species, we suggest that this approach itself constrains the prospect of collectively striving for a rich and nuanced yet accessible vision of interspecies flourishing.

## **I. The right not to be a perpetrator**

It is scholar, cultural critic, and artist Ariella Azoulay whose call for a right not to be a perpetrator inspires our reframing of nonhuman animal ethics and advocacy in this chapter. Motivated by her study of and experiences with the community of remaining individuals following the 1948 mass exile of Palestinians from Israel, Azoulay has called for a “civil awakening.” She writes:

It is time for Israeli Jews to cease the reproduction of violence, maintaining the consequences of the constitutive violence of 1948 that made Israeli Jews citizens, and Palestinians—non-citizens of their homeland. The time has come for Israeli Jews to recognize the constitutive disaster—the Nakba—not only as a Palestinian catastrophe but as a catastrophe in the production of which they are implicated on a daily basis. The time has come for the second generation of perpetrators—descendants of those who expelled Palestinians from their homeland—to claim *our* right, *our* fundamental and inalienable human right: *the right not to be perpetrators*. Without this fundamental right one can never be a citizen governed equally with others. (2012; emphasis added)

The second theorist informing our argument, moral philosopher and contemporary virtue ethicist Julia Annas, suggests that those of us living in unjust circumstances will lamentably, unfairly, and unavoidably find our cultivation of virtue to be correspondingly compromised. In her discussion of how to distinguish ideal virtuous action from ordinary virtuous action, Annas asks us to consider the plight of individuals attempting to act well in deeply and (now) obviously unjust societies:

Take a slave-owning society such as ancient Rome. If we find an ancient Roman acting humanely to his slaves, we find it odd to deny that he did the right thing. He did not, after all, do the wrong thing, which would have been to treat them cruelly, something he could have done with impunity. Does it follow that we think the ancient Roman virtuous? He is certainly virtuous by the standards of his society, where there is nothing illegal about abusing slaves. But if we ask whether this is what a truly virtuous person would do, we at once find ourselves inhibited, since this person lives in a slave society, and thus his exercise of all the virtues is constrained by the point that the conventions of his society, from which he learns the virtues, are systematically unjust. (2011, 45-46)

Annas draws our attention to the constraining forces of political, legal, and social structures on moral cognition and action. The Roman slave-owner cannot and does not act in a morally good way, only in a morally better way that he could be, and perhaps even in the best way that he possibly could. His failure to act in a morally good way is the result of his entanglement in the unjust circumstances of a slave society, circumstances that he may very well view as morally repugnant. His rejection of slavery, however, would be (at best) difficult, and at worst impossible (or even incoherent), as it would involve the rejection of attitudes and practices that formed the very foundation of social and political life. The onerous challenges that would be involved in his rejection of the particular practice of slavery suggest that he is unwillingly or unknowingly complicit in a practice that he might, in different circumstances, reject on moral grounds.

Typical evaluations of what has gone wrong in this sort of context might go like this: the rightness of the slave-owner's actions, or the goodness of his character (or whatever locus of moral evaluation to which we wish to appeal), depend on whether he fulfills his duty to avoid complicity in wrongful acts. While perfectly appropriate in a *prima facie* sense, this evaluation is neither sufficiently accurate nor productive in cases where the agent is in effect held hostage by the ubiquity and depth of their society's investment in those wrongful acts. That is, the claim that the slave-owner had a *duty* to reject complicity with slavery can only be made sense of if his *right* to reject slavery is recognized, and feasibly exercised. However, recognition of this right is a deep challenge precisely because of those unjust circumstances in which he finds himself.

There are other cases, conversely, where a failure to act or to resist wrongdoing occurs in far more hospitable contexts. Consider the infamous case of the broadly witnessed murder of

Kitty Genovese; as the classic interpretation goes,<sup>3</sup> many individuals were aware of her murder taking place and did not attempt to help stop it even though they might have done so without significant risk. As Judith Jarvis Thomson surmises, these individuals failed to act as even Minimally Decent Samaritans (1971, p. 63). The duty to reject complicity was unjustifiably neglected in the Genovese murder case, and this is partly because the right to reject complicity with her murder would have been feasibly exercised. Given that the right was not exercised, the individuals in question become blameworthy.

As an analogous case of blameworthy complicity in an interspecies wrong, consider the story that swept the Internet of a baby dolphin hauled from the water by holidaying beach-goers in Argentina, passed around the crowd for photo opportunities before being “left to die in the mud”, all caught on video (Holley, 2016). To be sure, despite their charismatic status in popular culture, dolphins are also the victims of a global culture of human supremacy: slaughtered for food, confined for human amusement, and regularly harmed by the presumptions of invasive “eco-tourism”. The point here, however, is that there is no norm in favour of the dolphin-handling in question comparable to the entrenched norms of meat-eating (more on which in the next section). The tourists should and could very easily have done otherwise at any time, and were roundly decried accordingly on social media.

It is difficult to apply this same judgement to the benevolent Roman slave-owner; under a charitable interpretation, he is indeed a victim of the circumstantial variety of what Thomas Nagel deems bad moral luck (1979, chap. 3). Nagel explains circumstantial moral luck as a form of moral luck that renders agents (seemingly) morally responsible for acts that they were involved in as a result of living in a given set of circumstances over which they had no control. To illustrate, he suggests that Nazi collaborators may be regarded as having bad circumstantial luck; if they had been removed from or not born into the deplorable circumstances of living in Nazi Germany under Hitler’s rule, they may very well have led morally decent—or perhaps even exemplary—lives (*ibid*). As individuals, their complicity with and perpetuation of wrongdoing was perhaps merely the tragic result of radically disempowering, radically evil, circumstances. When judged by context sensitive norms, passive bystanders to the atrocities of the Nazi regime

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<sup>3</sup> We employ the Genovese case illustratively, as it is a touchstone of the literature on complicity in social psychology and ethics, although we note that this interpretation—and indeed many of the facts of the matter—have been the subject of much scrutiny and criticism. See, for instance, Manning, Levine, and Collins’ (2007) critical overview of the impact of the Genovese case on the “psychological imagination” of subsequent decades.

would have been deemed (at least) acceptable members of the citizenry. In contrast to the case of the baby dolphin, we argue below that this pattern of collective denial and affirmation plays out in the normalized exploitation of nonhuman animals.

While we are not following Nagel in endorsing the incoherence of assigning moral responsibility in a deterministic world, we believe his account helps explain any hesitance to assign equal moral blame to the ancient Roman slave owner and to someone who attempted to enslave a human being in current society. Conversely, seldom do we praise individuals who refrain from owning (human) slaves in contemporary society.<sup>4</sup> Like any social justice advocates, nonhuman animal rights defenders have good reason to unpack this hesitance and incorporate it into the movement. As advocates we are called upon to draw the public's attention to the destructive impact of ubiquitously felt powerlessness on our integrity as moral agents and citizens, to refuse this powerlessness, and to identify ways of collectively reclaiming agency in deeply unjust circumstances. The first step is to generate awareness that complicity in the brutal and omnipresent system of nonhuman animal exploitation is, to a large extent, unavoidable; nonhuman animal products suffuse the realm of consumer goods, from processed foods to plastic bags. Individuals who do wish, or who would wish, given better access to information about this system, to resist and reject complicity, have their moral and political integrity and agency systematically compromised by the ever-widening grasp of the animal industrial complex. That is, their abilities to live morally well are deeply and unacceptably undermined; their moral right to not be perpetrators is violated, again and again, by the authoritative institutions that propel this exploitation, in large part through the cultivation of citizens' ignorance.

## **II. Vulnerable complicity: Silence and ignorance**

Turning in this section toward the sociological and psychological implications of the right to not be a perpetrator, our approach builds upon Annas' account of morally injurious social "standards" by highlighting the specifically epistemic and cognitive dimensions of these constraints. Exercising the right to not be a perpetrator thus entails a process of learning and re-habitation which Lorraine Code describes as "learning to recognize and refusing to participate

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to John Sanbonmatsu for raising this point in response to a past iteration of this work.

in social ignorance” (2014, p. 675). We situate this right within a schematic account of denial which, following Diedre Wicks (2011), draws on cognitive and sociological approaches to the patterns of silence, doubt, and avoidance which scaffold the mass exploitation of other species. As Norgaard has examined with respect to climate change, public responses to politically and emotionally charged knowledge draw from a cultural stock of norms and narratives (2006). When people manage feelings of guilt and powerlessness which threaten individual and collective identities, they do not just passively ignore or acquiesce to “the way things are”—rather, silence and avoidance are always dynamic products of particular political cultures. In the context of nonhuman animal agriculture, individuals may “unburden” themselves after eating meat by downgrading the moral status and mental faculties they attribute to other species (Loughnan, Haslam, and Bastian, 2010). Socially, as Timothy Pachirat (2011) has explored in ethnographic detail, slaughterhouses are “quarantined” from surrounding communities, the industrial process of killing made distant—even to slaughterhouse workers themselves—by complex partitions of law, language, and physical and social space.

Between the collaborative and often noisy etiquettes of silence found both at the dinner party and on the slaughterhouse floor, social attention to other species’ suffering is policed by an array of unspoken norms and collusive institutions (Zerubavel, 2006). The Newburyport News, a local Massachusetts paper, ran a story in 2013 headlined ‘Strange noises turn out to be cows missing their calves’:

Strange noises coming from High Road near Sunshine Dairy Farm Monday night and into yesterday morning prompted local police to alert residents that there’s nothing spooky or scary going on.

According to Newbury police Sgt. Patty Fisher, the noises are coming from mother cows who are lamenting the separation from their calves. [...]

Fisher said her department received at least four calls between midnight and 7 a.m. yesterday morning regarding inhuman sounding noises, prompting her to post a quick message on its Facebook page yesterday:

“Residents in the area of Sunshine Dairy Farm may notice loud noises coming from the dairy cows at all hours of the day and night. We’ve been informed that the cows

are not in distress and that the noises are a normal part of farming practices.” (Rogers, 2013)

As this disquieting example intimates, situations which demand complicity with harm-doing are everywhere. Anyone who unthinkingly purchases meat from the supermarket, clothes themselves in wool or leather, makes use of cosmetics tested on nonhuman animals, or even endures polite dinner conversation about the tenderness of some nonhuman animal flesh, is at least indirectly complicit in brutal acts. Even, or sometimes especially, those whose lives are devoted to the movement to abolish nonhuman animal exploitation are routinely complicit: consider an undercover activist working in a dairy farm, for whom the harmful separation of cow and calf, the continuing insemination of the cow, and the loading of spent cows onto trucks bound for the slaughterhouse, is obligatory. Surely that worker attempts harm minimization and beneficence wherever possible, and of course harbors noble and subversive intentions—and yet she is *directly* complicit in brutal acts.

The typical moral challenge to these behaviours and associated attitudes is made, reasonably enough, by appealing to their wrongness, rather than through an appeal to the wrongness of the conditions under which these behaviours were developed and executed. However, this evaluation, as we saw with the Roman slave owner, fails in cases where the agent’s reflective capacities were formed within a culture of passive violence that not only permits but requires denial and indifference for the social integrity of the self. To claim that the individual who fails to resist complicity in nonhuman animal exploitation by committing to veganism has a duty to reject said complicity can only be made sense of if her right to reject nonhuman animal exploitation is recognized, enabled, and feasibly exercised. If it is not, her duty is meaningless, and she falls victim to the bad moral luck that makes her an unwilling perpetrator.

The nonhuman animal rights movement therefore has good reason to take seriously the fact that social, political, and cultural circumstances encourage particular cognitive and affective habits, which in turn encourage particular constructions of the good life and what it means to be a good citizen. According to some nonhuman animal rights activists, insidious habits and constructions can be avoided only by identifying and rejecting the basic structure from which they develop. Melanie Joy, for instance, suggests that the ideology of carnism, which sustains the



animal industrial complex, is derived from specialized forms of cultivated ignorance that corrode integrity and agency by transforming individuals into passive consumers (2010, p. 116). By rewarding denial and ignorance with social currency and recognizable manifestations of self-determination that serve powerful psychological needs, carnism sustains itself by ensuring significant harms to those whose criticisms of the belief system penetrate beyond its margins. To be sure, any individual who manages to conceptualize nonhuman animals as legitimate targets of empathy, of love, of justice, will have done so imperfectly and in spite of deep-seated cognitive and social processes enacted in, for instance, discourses of objectification and massification. Nonetheless, even for those prepared to grapple with “a shared commodity fetishism where the body and suffering of both worker and animal vanish into a single consumable product” (Pedersen and Stanescu, 2014, p. 268), the possibility of subverting this carnist matrix will, at best, be compromised by the destructive threats posed to the agent who attempts to live with thoroughgoing openness to the reality of nonhuman animal suffering and commitment to a non-anthropocentric conception of goodness and justice.

We are now better situated to establish the nature of unwilling complicity and the significance of Azoulay’s call to the nonhuman animal rights movement. Driving her call for a civil awakening is her interpretation of the ringing silence in the aftermath of the Nakba as a product of collective repression of the event and refusal to acknowledge its wrongness, which renders Israeli citizens complicit in the state’s wrongdoing. Often unwilling (and often unthinking) yet inescapable complicity in the conjoined silence and ongoing state violence since the exile forecloses opportunities for meaningful resistance and consists, for Azoulay, in nothing less than a violation of Israeli citizens’ integrity as moral beings. It is precisely these mechanisms that foster the structures of denial sustaining systematic and brutal nonhuman animal oppression, and ultimately call into question the duty-centered approach to nonhuman animal rights theory and advocacy. Two moral implications of unwilling complicity in harmful acts thus concern, respectively, how the unwilling perpetrator is wronged and how the unwillingly complicit ought not to be the primary targets of criticism. Each of these draws on the right not to be a perpetrator.

The term “complicity” most generally refers to contributing to wrongdoing. In their article “Complicity and its Conceptual Cousins” (2013), Chiara Lepora and Robert Goodin show that complicity is otherwise a nebulous category that contains a number of different concepts with varying moral valences; they point out that one may be involved in wrongdoing in a variety

of ways, with varying levels of contribution, common planning, and willingness. These include cooperation, collaboration, collusion, conspiracy, connivance, and condoning. Complicity itself may be more narrowly defined, Lepora and Goodin argue, as being “wrapped up” in wrongdoing, in a way that expands or magnifies that wrongdoing’s effectiveness (or may have). Complicit acts do not “constitute” the principal wrongdoing (2013, pp. 41-42). While the authors suggest that complicity carries an epistemic condition – the complicit individual knows or should have known that her act would or would likely expand or magnify the effectiveness of the relevant wrongdoing (p. 42)—we suggest that, outside the realm of law and punishment, knowledge of the wrongdoing and one’s role in it is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for complicity. If it turns out that one is contributing to wrongdoing, whether or not one knows that one is contributing to that wrongdoing does not remove *responsibility* for one’s contribution. It may, however, as we have been proposing with appeal to both empirical and normative theoretical evidence, remove *blameworthiness* for that contribution.

The detachability of responsibility and blameworthiness is perhaps most vividly—if not also depressingly—revealed in cognitive dissonance research, which shows that individuals are less able to recognize injustice and harm when doing so would be futile. Humans are endowed with reliable and unconscious cognitive and emotional mechanisms that protect us from recognizing our complicity in harm. For instance, as discussed above, situational and chronic meat consumption attenuates the attribution of mental lives to farmed nonhuman animals (Bilewicz, Imhoff, & Drogosz, 2011; Loughnan, Haslam, and Bastian, 2010), and study participants who ascribed diminished mentality to these animals reported less negative emotional arousal when anticipating meat consumption. This emerging social psychology of nonhuman animal product consumption motivates the view that one’s duty to not be complicit in wrongdoing hinges on the ability to conceive and exercise one’s right not to be complicit in wrongdoing, and that agents may contribute to wrong acts without being morally blameworthy. One of the most pressing tasks of interspecies ethics and advocacy, we suggest, is to integrate such advances in sociology and social psychology into the normative core of interspecies justice. By highlighting patterns of social ignorance and denial as morally injurious to the perpetrators themselves, recognizing the right not to be a perpetrator could help to establish a sociological and psychological research program within the political movement for just interspecies community.

### **III. Beyond complicity and denial: objections and directions for advocacy**

Before concluding, we meet in turn one conceptual and one practical challenge to our proposal, both of which bear on how the movement for interspecies justice might advance the right not to be a perpetrator as a platform for outreach and protest.

By this point, it may have occurred to the reader that there already exists a protected entitlement for the individual faced with socially condoned or even mandated practices with which she disagrees. This is the right to make conscientious objections and generally to be allowed choices that reflect one's conscientious commitments. Living in a liberal democracy entails being granted individualized liberties that are viewed as necessary to pursue one's idea of the good. On Rawls's influential account, "the burdens of judgment set limits on what can be reasonably justified to others, and so they endorse some form of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought." (2005, p. 59)

Perhaps, then, proposing the right not to be a perpetrator involves unnecessarily and unjustifiably recasting the more basic entitlement that citizens in liberal societies already have to make free, self-determined choices, even when these choices require special treatment (in the form of, for instance, exemptions from certain dress codes). The right to make such choices is based in anti-discrimination law; invoked on religious grounds, for instance, anti-discrimination law concerns the importance of religion to identity and culture. It is not possible to act as a free individual who is self-determined without protection of religious freedom. As rational beings that are able to be self-determining, in a liberal democratic society citizens have the right to live their lives in a way that exercises this capacity. The state has a corresponding obligation to ensure that the appropriate conditions are in place for this to happen, and more generally, to accommodate (within reason) citizens' diverse notions of the good, by making exemptions and allowances available when conscientious commitments run sufficiently deep. To fail to fulfill this obligation would consist in discrimination.

If there are no conceptual barriers to the inclusion of non-religious commitments in identity-forming notions of the good, then the particular freedoms necessary to realize one's rejection of nonhuman animal exploitation may be appropriately cast as rights. Perhaps the right

to refuse complicity with nonhuman animal agriculture can be manifest through a right to be vegan, for instance, which would protect the individual's freedom to make choices that reflect and honour one's rejection of nonhuman animal exploitation. Supporters of this view include Cara Hunt (2010) and David Sztybel (2012), who have argued that an ethical commitment to veganism is on par with the religious commitments that activate this right to be accommodated. For them, it stands to reason that if one's idea of the good involves a rejection of nonhuman animal torture and exploitation, one may have a right to be vegan in the same way a religious individual may have a right to eat kosher. Hunt reasons that "Ethical Veganism is directly analogous to the spirit of protection for and the underlying value of the freedom of religion" (2010, p. 20).

If making vegan choices is crucial to maintaining one's self-conception, it may be that vegans have a right against the state to, for instance, be exempt from non-vegan vaccines and provided an alternative. Such rights are indeed edging toward codification in some jurisdictions: the Ontario Human Rights Commission, for instance, has updated its anti-discrimination policy to accommodate "non-religious belief systems", a definition that interspecies justice advocates hope to leverage in future appeals to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (Labchuk, 2016). In this chapter, however, we are not attempting to advance nonhuman animal rights through appeal to the state's obligations to accommodate choices of conscience, and are not keen to advance veganism as a right that pertains to *my particular values* that could have been developed by anyone, should they have been influenced by the right things. That is, in identifying the cognitive dysfunctions of speciesism we are not pointing to the sorts of "burdens of judgment" that warrant the toleration of veganism as a "reasonable comprehensive doctrine".

The right not to be a perpetrator does not and should not adhere to this logic. The right we propose is a foundationally moral one, which should apply to all citizens, regardless of whether their notion of the good involves a "faith" to veganism. The wrongdoing of the state with which we are concerned consists not in discrimination against equally legitimate notions of the good that are foundational to individuals' characters, but rather in the failure to correct a state of affairs that makes it nearly impossible for citizens to avoid complicity in systematic harm. To place the burden of responsibility on individuals to opt out of a fundamentally unjust set of circumstances and frame this opting out in terms of one's particular commitments that form

one's self-conception obfuscates the core problem of the virtual inescapability of ongoing complicity with nonhuman animal exploitation.

A second obvious and reasonable criticism could suggest that by refusing to blame individuals complicit in nonhuman animal exploitation we are not only slowing progress toward interspecies justice but setting the stage for a reversal in hard-won consciousness-raising. That is, are we letting wrongdoers off the hook? Assigning accountability may require a willingness to condemn harmful acts in a way that includes blame; to do otherwise may imply commitment to a conception of the citizen as implausibly passive and helpless. Such a conception is itself surely an affront to moral and political integrity, as well as a questionable way of doing justice to those who are most deeply harmed by the current system.

To be sure, we do not wish to dismiss nonhuman animal advocacy's role in establishing human obligations to other species and condemning failures to meet those obligations. However, the central problem for nonhuman animals and the central concern for nonhuman animal advocates do not, we venture, hinge on assigning blame to individuals for their complicity in harms so widespread and so culturally embedded that they have become nearly invisible. Note that it is most importantly the *harms* associated with the acts rather than the acts as such that have become invisible; consider, for instance, what Jovian Parry calls "the new visibility of slaughter" in popular gastronomy (2010). Rather, the core problem concerns the spectres of indifference, apathy, antagonism, and defensiveness—all strenuously socially performed—that threaten mutual intelligibility and engagement between advocates and non-advocates.

Shifting part of the nonhuman animal advocacy discourse to one of the rights-infringement of human citizens is more likely to create opportunities for good faith dialogue between nonhuman animal advocates and the general citizenry. Real or perceived moral condemnation of others' beliefs and practices can deepen resistance and diminished openness to new ways of living. Gladly, this moral judgment need not take place; overcoming indifference and hostility requires acknowledging the difficulty and undesirability of convincing people that they are the rightful targets of blame. The discourse of a right not to be a perpetrator shifts the locus of blame from the individual citizen to the social edifice of collective denial, and so to the state that has failed to provide individual citizens the conditions necessary for making morally decent choices.

Our account therefore *supplements* recent modes of framing collective action for nonhuman animals. A clear case of how this can work is in the movement's investigative reporting and appeals to civil liberties in light of "ag-gag" legislation. By allowing nonhuman animal agriculture practices to be essentially lawless and hidden, in a way that allows for brutal and pervasive harm to continue unchecked, and by radicalizing those who wish to challenge these practices, the state has stripped moral and political agency from its citizens. As Cody Carlson explains, some states' adoption of so-called ag-gag laws [making it illegal to videotape nonhuman animal raising and slaughtering facilities] is a particularly obvious attempt to remove opportunities for awareness. Writing about an Iowa ag-gag bill in *The Atlantic*, Carlson contends: "The Ag Gag laws pretend to be about preventing "fraud," but they actually perpetuate it. They protect a system where consumers are regularly deceived into supporting egregious animal suffering, deplorable working conditions, and environmental degradation." (2012) Major purveyors of nonhuman animal products such as Whole Foods Market have moved to commodify discontent, expending considerable resources to forge brand identities appealing to the conscientious stewardship of farmed nonhuman animals; Whole Foods refers to the ostensibly value-driven segment of their consumer base as "Conscionables." (Whole Foods Market, 2012, p. 4) As Cole (2011) contends, these discourses of attention to nonhuman animal wellbeing function to camouflage the realities of rearing and slaughter. Whole Foods, for example, has spent an estimated 15 to 20 million US dollars on their first national advertising campaign to shore up their hold on the "conscionables" (Elliott, 2014), trumpeting multimedia slogans such as "Pick a Chicken, Cook a Chicken, Know your Chicken" and "Choose a Fish, Cook a Fish, Save a Fish". Correspondingly, ag-gag laws serve to inoculate the claims of Whole Foods and other marketing campaigns against public scrutiny. The ability of individuals who do wish—or who would wish, given better access to information about this system—to resist and reject complicity and live morally decent lives is grossly undermined by these laws, and by other policies and initiatives that cultivate civic ignorance.

Collective resistance to laws designed specifically to short-circuit attempts to weaken the structures of denial locate accountability for nonhuman animal exploitation appropriately and effectively, and would be facilitated through appeal to the right not to be a perpetrator. Such deception can then be understood appropriately as an especially invidious form of wrongdoing, insofar as it fails to respect the right of the public to be informed about state practices that would

be vehemently opposed if they were publically revealed in a robust sense—that is, made available without contorting psychological protective mechanisms.

Yet information and sensory experience do not constitute *knowing* in the sense necessary to effect structural change. As Charles Mills has argued, systematic domination has “cognitive consequences” both for the oppressed and for the oppressors (1997). Mills’ concern in *The Racial Contract* is what he takes to be a global system of white supremacy, but white ignorance, he notes, “is not the only kind of privileged group ignorance” (p. 235). White ignorance consists of

an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made. (1997, p. 18)

Accordingly, for Mills, the normative analysis of white supremacy must develop a robust social epistemology of white ignorance: a diagnosis and eventual treatment of the “delusion of racial superiority” which insinuates itself in “perception, conception, memory, testimony, and motivational group interest” (2007). The right not to be a perpetrator invites a comparable research agenda for the theory and advocacy of interspecies justice, a normative hinge joining developments in the social psychology of ignorance and denial to a conception of interspecies flourishing which examines, as moral injuries in and of themselves, the acute vulnerabilities perpetuated by systematic complicity in interspecies injustices. Pachirat concludes his account of the politics of sight in the slaughterhouse by cautioning against “the assumption that simply making the repugnant visible is sufficient to generate a transformational politics” (2011, p. 247). Informed by theories of socially organised denial, which we have only sketched here, the right not to be a perpetrator heeds both Mills and Pachirat in challenging and enriching the watchwords of ‘transparency’ and ‘visibility’ for interspecies justice. Claiming a right against complicity frames a commitment within and beyond nonhuman animal advocacy to cognitive, cultural, and political emancipation from our collective victimisation as unwilling accomplices in systematic wrongdoing.

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