

Greening Animal Defense? Examining Whether Appealing to Climate Change and the Environment Is an Effective Advocacy Strategy to Reduce Oppression of Nonhumans

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Abstract: Animal advocates are uncertain about whether it is effective to use environmental or climate change messages emphasizing the impact on global warming of factory farming along with, or even in place of, more radical and ideological messages emphasizing justice, abolition, and cruelty toward other animals. Particularly, the real, long-term effectiveness of environment-based arguments in general, and climate change arguments in particular, is unclear. This article attempts to contribute to this discussion by examining some of the reasons that best support or refute the use of an environmental frame for the defense of nonhuman animals from a nonspeciesist and abolitionist perspective. The conclusion is that there are strong arguments for both stances, though, at least for long-term behavioral change, the use of green arguments seems to have more drawbacks.

Keywords: animal advocacy, environment, climate change, animal defense, speciesism, animal oppression, strategic communication

The discussion regarding what are the best arguments when advocating for nonhuman animals is a permanent source of controversy. Communication scholars, social marketing experts, and social psychologists have recurrently stressed that the perfect strategy simply does not exist; effectiveness depends on the public you want to influence, so there are as many potential strategies as different publics. Therefore, the perfect strategy is always the one best adapted to our target. However, attempting to identify triggers of social change that can be pivotal for a wide range of targeted audiences is not a futile task. To this respect, one of the arguments increasingly used in the struggle to reduce the oppression suffered by other animals is the impact on the environment of our speciesist practices, particularly the impact of the agribusiness industry on global warming.

Animal scholars and advocates, including the author of this article, have progressively added an environmental approach to the justice- and compassion-based approaches in the defense of nonhuman animals to reach larger audiences, attract the interest of media, and influence human habits. Hence, it is very common in current advocacy campaigns and academic discussions to use climate change messages emphasizing the impact on global warming of factory farming along with, or even in place of, more radical and ideological messages emphasizing justice, abolition, and cruelty toward other animals.

However, the real, long-term effectiveness of environmental arguments is unclear. Research has shown that an effective request for quick behavioral change may not always trigger a lasting change; for instance, some studies suggest that eating habits grounded on ethical principles produce a stronger commitment to a vegetarian/vegan diet, and that this commitment lasts longer (Hoffman, Stallings, Bessinger, & Brooks, 2013; Radnitz, Beezhold, & DiMatteo, 2015). It is also true that research has been so far usually focused on comparing health, not environmental, arguments versus ethical ones. So, we really do not know yet how beneficial or harmful an appeal to environment really is for animal defense.

This article will elaborate on this topic to contribute to the discussion of whether appeals to environmental protection in general, and climate change mitigation in particular, are effective strategies for a long-term behavioral change that suppresses speciesist habits and, therefore, puts us on the track of abolishing animal oppression. To this purpose, I will skip the details of the impact of animal agriculture on global warming and the environment in general, since they are nowadays widely known and available.¹ Instead, I will focus on the core of the issue: what arguments, from an objective viewpoint, best support or refute the use of environmental appeals for animal defense. In order to provide the context to this analysis, this article first makes some methodological and theoretical clarifications and then it splits into two sections: The first one gathers the arguments that may support using the environmental/climate change appeal, while the second one summarizes the arguments that do not back the effectiveness of this approach.

Although my point is not to end up with a definitive answer and I am actually far from thinking that there is a single way to advocate against oppressions, I conclude with some remarks that might help decision making in animal advocacy.

Preliminary Clarifications

By greening the defense of nonhuman animals, I refer to the inclusion in advocacy strategies of environment-based arguments that directly or indirectly support a reduction (or abolition) of any type of production of “goods” involving animal exploitation. This environmental frame may include both open claims to protect the environment for the sake of nonhuman animals and claims that establish no rapport with the ultimate goal of activists (animal defense). Although the presence of environment-based arguments in animal advocacy has arisen in the context of global warming and anthropogenic climate change, there are some claims related to the environment that may not be directly related to climate change; hence, the “environmental frame” concept used in this article reflects this.

The discussion provided in this article is based on a nonspeciesist, abolitionist approach. It draws on the wealth of knowledge generated since Darwin by cognitive biologists, ethologists, neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers on nonhuman animals’ intelligence, emotions, and morality, including their capacity to suffer and the relevance of their interests, rights, and moral consideration. From this understanding, the ideology of speciesism—a form of anthropocentrism that denies nonhumans’ interests any moral consideration equal to those of humans (Horta, 2010)—is no longer defensible, and the abolition of all practices entailing the exploitation of nonhuman animals is considered a moral obligation. Therefore, the arguments provided in this article are discussed under the light of their efficacy regarding the paradigm shift that human society needs in its relationship with other species.

For the gathering of the list of ideas examined in this article, I performed three tasks: First, I conducted a literature review to identify the main arguments used by communication, advocacy, social psychology, and social marketing authors regarding the use of the environmental frame or any other indirect frame that makes for a comparison (health for instance). Second, the results

¹ Since a few pioneering reports produced the first public scientific acknowledgment of the links between animal agriculture and climate change (Eshel & Martin, 2006; Steinfeld et al., 2006; Worldwatch Institute, 2004), the list of evidences has grown relentlessly, including other governmental reports (e.g., Gerber et al., 2013; Leip et al., 2010; Schwarzer, 2012), nongovernmental green organizations’ reports (e.g., Bellarby, Foerid, Hastings, & Smith, 2008; Hamerschlag, 2011; Thomas, 2010), scientific papers (e.g., Carlsson-Kanyama & González, 2009; Eshel, Sheponb, Makovc, & Milob, 2014; McMichael, Powles, Butler, & Uauy, 2007; Scarborough et al., 2014), books (e.g., Kemmerer, 2014; Lymbery, 2017; Lymbery & Oakeshott, 2014), think tank research (Bailey, Antony, & Wellesley, 2014; Goodland & Anhang, 2009; Pew Environment Group, 2011; Ranganathan et al., 2016; Renner, 2014), and even political party output (e.g., Holm & Jokkala, 2007; Soeters & Zwanikken, 2007) among a countless number of media reports and research.

were presented and discussed at the EACAS conference at the University of Lund in October 2017 and; third, they were later debated in a course with professional and amateur animal advocates at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. The goal was not to end up with a comprehensive list of pros and cons regarding the use of the environmental frame in animal advocacy, but just to identify ideas that might be powerful enough to support or refute the efficacy of this strategy. For the sake of transparency, I must acknowledge that I started this exercise from a stance supportive of plural strategies, thus favoring the use of more than one strategy. This was so for different reasons. First, because of the decades of evidences we have that the three main pillars of rhetoric (ethos, logos, and pathos) does not work alone but interrelatedly, complementing each other. Second, because we have also widely experienced that there is not a single audience or public to persuade but several, if not many, and thus we must have the capacity to build messages that resonate with all of them, however different they may (or seem to) be. As a result of this analysis, however, my support to a pluralistic approach has been weakened, though not vanished.

Finally, what has been undertaken here it is not new—assessing how diverting strategies not focused on nonhuman animals may help in their defense—but it has been rarely conducted in depth for the environmental frame, while it has been a bit more studied, for instance, for human health (how much useful it is for animal advocacy to alert people of the harm animal products have on their bodies).

Some authors have nevertheless introduced extensively the environmental topic in their recommendations. For instance, U.S. scholar Carrie P. Freeman (2014), in her research on the arguments and effectiveness of the U.S. animal rights movement, includes environmental destruction in her list of best strategies for framing animal- protein foods as a problem (following injustice and cruelty/suffering frames). In the United Kingdom, advocate Philip Lymbery (Compassion in World Farming) has been, for instance, putting a great emphasis on the environmental impact of the industrial animal complex in his books *Farmageddon: The True Cost of Cheap Meat* (Lymbery & Oakeshott, 2014) and *Dead Zone: Where the Wild Things Go* (Lymbery, 2017). The best-selling quality of Lymbery’s work evidences the attractiveness for the public of such an approach, and thus the undeniable impact of the environmental message.²

Arguments That May Support the Use of the Environmental Frame

In this section, I will discuss some arguments in favor of using the environmental frame in animal advocacy, including the lack of information theory, the benefits of frame extension, the minority influence theory and pragmatism, the power of intersecting, the dual quality of the environmental frame, the emotional appeals involved, the impact of changing environmental behaviors, and the effectiveness of targeting all motivations.

The likely most elementary argument related to the potential effectiveness of using an environmental frame in animal advocacy is the *lack of information thesis*. In climate change theory, a line of research assumes that a lack of information about the causes of global warming is the primary reason for the public’s failure to respond— what Harriet Bulkeley (2000) calls the “information-deficit-model.” Likewise, it could be extrapolated that a lack of information about the strong links between animal agriculture and global warming (and of the impact of the former on food sovereignty, social justice, world hunger, etc.) prevents people concerned for the environment from reducing or fully stopping the consumption of animal-based food. This argument assumes that either many people still are not aware of those links or are aware of them

² It must be said, however, that Lymbery supports a bucolic view of rural animal exploitation, which in spite of its practical and ethical problems is becoming increasingly popular as a solution to the impact of animal agriculture on the environment.

but do not believe or assimilate them, and once people know and assimilate the information, they will change their behavior. According to this, the argument goes, more people would go vegetarian or vegan for environmental reasons if they knew the impact animal oppression has for the planet.

Although information-deficit explanations must be always taken into account regarding public apathy, the argument has several weak points who have actually been pinpointed by climate change researchers. Thus, for instance, Norgaard (2006) reminds us that the information-deficit explanations do not account for the climate inaction “of the significant number of people who do know about global warming, believe it is happening, and express concern about it” nor can explain “why levels of concern are decreasing as scientific consensus increases and predictions about the consequences of climate change become more severe” (p. 348).

Some animal advocate authors consider, however, that environmentalism can be useful for animal defense for different reasons that have to do with what has been called *frame extension*, the capacity of some frames to expand toward others. This argument is brought about by the fact that some researchers have identified (a) the environmental concern among the core motivations of some vegetarians (Maurer, 2002) and (b) some traits among environmentalists that have an impact on at least dietary changes (like gender concern, living with an animal, anthropomorphic beliefs, cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy toward animals, altruism, perceived animal intelligence, etc.; Bertolaso, 2015). Freeman (2014) labels this as the areas were animal ethics and environmental ethics overlap. In this respect, Freeman (2014) argues that the environmental destruction frame “takes the animal rights movement’s goal of veganism and extends it out via ecological principles” (p. 235). Thus, this argument goes, people concerned about the environment develops an awareness that may make them more prepared than nonenvironmentalists to move toward refraining from harming other animals—environmentalists actually should be quite ready to engage in veganism if only for the sake of consistency. So, turning people into environmentalists should help nearing people toward the animal defense cause.

The latter argument has similar problems to those of the previous one, since it does not account for the behavior of the significant number of environmentalists who refuse to move toward a full plant-based diet. Also, though the areas of overlap between both environmentalists and animal advocates may be relevant (according to Freeman [2014] “the mutual desire to protect wilderness areas and species from extinction” [p. 235]), they both address them with radically different approaches, which includes environmentalists caring only for certain nonhuman animals and doing so from a speciesist approach (that may involve culling nonhuman animals if it is deemed *necessary* for a *superior* ecological good).

Another argument that may support the idea of using the environmental frame is the *minority influence theory*. The defense of nonhuman animals is still a minority movement and for minority groups can be extremely difficult to have their messages accepted (Moscovici, 1976). On the other hand, environmentalism is a bigger, much more normalized movement, and thus much more accepted. Thus, it follows from this, if animal advocates place themselves within the environmental frame, they may have more chances to reduce resistance and, therefore, to be more influential.

This strategy is directly connected with the *pragmatism* defended by authors like Leenaert (2017) and the Effective Altruism movement. Following the definition of the Cambridge Essential English Dictionary, Leenaert (2017) reminds us that pragmatism is dealing with a problem in a manner that suits the conditions that really exist, rather than following fixed theories, ideas or rules. “Being pragmatic, then is about reality rather than rules” (p. 22). In this respect, using an environmental frame is adopting a pragmatic stance, particularly if we adopt a nonethical environmental stance (i.e., acting just for our sake rather than for altruistic motives

toward other animals). Leenaert, makes an instrumental claim that resonates with history, because of the several social conquests and changes initiated by what for many advocates at the time seemed just compromising—a wrong behavior being ended by a nonmoral driver, including, for instance, the ending of human slavery or of whaling. In opposition to the alleged superior effectiveness of value-based frames, as supported by a large portion of the literature, the pragmatic approach promotes a more pluralistic scenario where activists should not systematically think that moral arguments are the best ones and that non- moral ones are problematic. The reason animal advocates think so, Leenaert states, is just because activists themselves are driven by moral motives—that is, they are biased toward their own motives.

The pragmatist approach, which is, on my view, unjustly criticized as complicit with the oppressors by some animal advocates, implies that any strategy is good—advocating against climate change, for instance, rather than directly for the nonhuman animals oppressed—if through it we obtain the best possible outcome with the least harm at a given context and moment. Yet the pragmatic approach has also some risks, some of them very much acknowledged by its same promoters, as for example, the watering down of the concept of veganism or the problem with consistency. The latter refers to the claim made by pragmatics that consistency is overrated, and it can become a barrier if turned into a dogma since there is no such thing as 100% consistency. Life is inconsistent per definition. Overall, those risks reflect the fact that pragmatism should be provided in the right dose and moment to the right public and time. With regard to the environmental frame, too much pragmatism may imply people resuming their old habits as soon as human technology manages to reduce the impact of animal agriculture on the environment—allowing us to exploit and oppress even larger numbers of nonhumans but with hypothetically less or zero impact on the planet.

The next argument for using of the environmental frame has to do with *intersectionality*. Since Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced the theory of intersectionality to feminist theory with the aim to formulate a theoretical framework connecting racism and sexism, the idea of the interlocking of systems of power has spread to encompass all forms of social stratification (race and sex but also class, gender, age, etc.) and more recently also speciesism and environmental destruction. The idea that all forms of exploitation—including the objectification and commoditization of nature and non- human animals—do not exist separately from each other but are complexly interwoven is, for instance, the bedrock of the “total liberation” theory of scholars like Steve Best (2014)—who argues for the liberation of humans, nonhumans, and the earth “as different components of one inseparable struggle” (p. xii).

Aligned with this, Freeman (2014) acknowledges that maybe the environmental message is not enough to reduce, much less stop, the consumption of animal products, but it can have a practical positive impact—on the animals living in nature—and a conceptual impact—helping to deconstruct the human/animal binary, which is at the heart of the exploitation system, what sisters Ko deem the “bedrock of the white supremacist logic” (Ko & Ko, 2017, p. 47). The need of uprooting of the human–animal divide to uprooting this exploitative logic makes for an excellent metaphor of what intersectionality represents. It follows, then, that including the environmental frame in animal advocacy may help triggering this intersectional approach that provides the big picture of oppression and exploitation, and thus acknowledgement of how naive is to pursue any cause without taking into account how far-reaching is this systemic exploitation.

Therefore, using an environmental frame to defend other animals could be beneficial for both, the other animals and the environment, if it is done in a way that highlights the interconnection among exploitations—and most important, how all oppressions are forged by the same constructs based on male, White, Eurocentric, and human-centric views. Of course, this is something easier to say than apply, considering how entrenched and invisible this male, White, Eurocentric, and human-centric dominion is in the majority of us.

Also, the environmental frame is a *dual frame*, since it can appeal both to altruistic, ethical values or to selfish, and self-interested motives (Freeman, 2014). This may be seen as problematic, but it is actually something that could be taken advantage of.

On one hand, the environmental claim can be built around an altruistic frame, to protect life on earth for the sake of others (human or/and nonhuman). On the other, it allows for a selfish frame, to protect life on earth for our own sake (as individuals or as species). However, even when self-interest is the motive, there is a positive outcome—including not only a reduction in waste and pollution which may benefit non-human animals but also a positive impact on human health, world hunger, food sovereignty, use of antibiotics, and so on. Therefore, using an environmental frame to defend nonhuman animals allegedly involves always an ethical outcome, which research shows is particularly important when trying to maintain difficult behavioral changes (Crompton, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2013). Freeman (2014), after her research on five major U.S. animal advocacy organizations, concludes that “communication messages that encourage altruistic or self-transcendent values in society can help change more than just a specific behavior; they help change worldviews and people’s sense of self” (p. 175).

Due to the fact that we are relatively insensitive to statistics (Kolbert, 2017), the fact that the environmental argument can be framed ethically is very useful. However, as Leenaert (2017) reminds, moral claims can also backfire (p. 71). If there is something advocates, social marketing experts and social psychologists know for sure is that people do not like others to preach to them (Taft, 2016). Moral frames are very useful when we tag messages onto values that people already possess, this makes the messages resonate within them (Benford & Snow, 2000). However, when we tell people they should have values different than the ones they hold (like restraining to eat meat because this is a polluting, human supremacist habit), persuasion-resistance emerges. It may be useful—even mandatory—to criticize and disrespect some specific audience’s values and behaviors when the latter are openly discriminatory and in conflict with mainstream social justice values (Freeman, 2014, p. 74). However, in the case of common citizens aligned with mainstream practices (including speciesism), attempts requesting a change may be problematic—as so many vegan advocates experience every day. Therefore, it is useful that the environmental claim can be framed with nonmoral arguments as well, like selfish arguments (stop eating meat can be claimed to mitigate global warming just for humans’ self-protection). In this sense, the environmental frame can be useful as an alternative when moral claims are impractical.

Naturally, with nonmoral claims, we have the same problem as with pragmatism: if only selfish interests are involved, as soon as human technology is available (or pre-tends to be) to reduce waste and pollution, for example, in dietary habits, people may adhere to their old habits regardless whether this means equal or more oppression for other animals. The fact that we do not even need real technology to do so, but just a claim that technology will be able to help us in the future of course increases the risks of such a frame. Due to the widespread faith in technology, this weak point of the environmental frame should not be neglected.

Related to the above, another advantage of the environmental frame is that it allows for emotional claims. As we have mentioned, *logos* alone, that is, appeals to rationality or logic including statistics and data, are not enough. Knowing the data, having the information, does not suffice. If it did, then learning the statistics on how millions of individuals are suffering (humans or not humans) should trigger a stronger reaction than learning about the plight of one single individual; yet the opposite is true (e.g., Small, Lowenstein, & Slovic, 2005). This is because we are mostly driven by emotions, and we can connect far better to an individual than to a crowd or group. Thus, emotional appeals to empathy and compassion by means of moral shocks or personal stories can be very effective (Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). The environmental frame, particularly with climate change, allows for this type of arguments very easily. The impact of climate change on humans and nonhumans can be certainly illustrated with personal

stories, including the impact of the production of animal protein on the earth, humans, and, of course, nonhumans inside and outside farms.

Another argument that may support the use of the environmental frame for animal advocacy is related with behavioral and attitudinal change. The theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Miller, Clark, & Jehle, 2015) postulates that humans permanently strive to maintain consistency among their different cognitions (beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, values, behavior, etc.) and thus, when inconsistency (dissonance) arises, individuals feel psychologically uncomfortable and try to reduce the dissonance as much as possible. Dissonance reduction can be achieved by changing actions, by changing cognition, or selectively acquiring new information or opinions. In addition, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance. Festinger used the example of smokers who, knowing that smoking is bad for health, tried to reduce dissonance by either (a) quitting smoking, (b) changing their thoughts about smoking being harmful, or (c) acquiring new knowledge that points to the positive effects of smoking (e.g., smoking prevents weight gain). The parallelism with meat eaters is apparent. Facing the knowledge that eating meat is bad for human and planetary health and causes extreme suffering to nonhuman animals, meat eaters may choose either to (a) become vegan, (b) change their thoughts about eating meat being harmful, and (c) acquiring new knowledge that points to the positive effects of meat eating (e.g., the alleged benefits of livestock for the environment). As it was obvious with smokers at Festinger's time and it is with meat eaters nowadays, option (a) is the most uncommon.

Also, pragmatist authors like Leenaert (2017) reminds us that ethical awakening (entailing a sudden and irreversible change in attitudes) may happen, but it is not as common as behavioral change. This is so because behaviors are much easier to change than attitudes. Behaviors have to do with concrete actions under concrete circumstances, while attitudes and values have to do with abstract, general worldviews, comprehensive conceptions, or apprehensions of the world. It is, for instance, much easier to change behaviors regarding single-use, plastic bags in shops (by banning them through regulations) than to change people's attitudes toward plastic in general.

Importantly, behaviors can in turn produce changes in attitudes. For instance, some researches claim that people who start out reducing or avoiding animal proteins for health reasons progress to include ethical reasons to align with their new behavior (Faunalytics, 2007, 2012, 2014). Likewise, the environmental frame can make people advocate for changes in regulation (e.g., taxing animal agriculture and subsidizing plant-based alternatives) that reduce meat consumption, for global warming mitigation, and thus drive changes in behaviors which in time can produce ethical awakening (produce long-lasting changes in attitudes toward other animals).

The objection usually raised against this strategy is how to know what behavioral changes must be promoted to achieve long-standing changes in values and attitudes, since not all behavioral changes have the same power to ethically awaken people. Also, there is the very significant problem related to whether we are legitimated to force behavioral changes through regulation. In the case of smoking, for instance, the smoking ban in public areas clearly triggered a change in behavior that rapidly increased the support against tobacco among public opinion. However, the change in the minds of the people had already taken place in society, regulation against tobacco was passed with a majority of public opinion in favor. On the contrary, it is well known that the first major step toward the abolition of human slavery did not have the support of a majority of society at the time. Precisely because abolitionists lacked the majority's support, and frustrated after decades of null progress, the U.K. antislavery movement decided to foster a covert measure against the foreign slave trade, promoted as a necessary war measure (the Foreign Slave Trade Act 1806, 46 Geo III c 52). This very clever legal tactic effectively prohibited two thirds of the British Slave Trade, in spite of being passed because it was defended as a war measure (it banned any British subject participating in the Slave Trade to the

French colonies while the British were at war with Napoleon and his allies). This helped later to ban the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1807, which again was an intermediate stage accepted by the abolitionists, who were very much aware of the impossibility at the time to pass any measure resting on general abolition principles (Hague, 2008). With the benefit of hindsight, we all now accept that those decisions were right, in spite of its hidden agenda not counting with a majority of public support.

Finally, and aligned with some of the previous arguments, the environmental frame can also be useful for animal advocates to reinforce a *plural strategy*. As noted before, since audiences are plural is naive to launch mass advocacy campaigns and expect that one same set of arguments fits all audiences. On the contrary, it seems wiser to favor more targeted approaches what in short means to have a variety of reasons that we use according to the publics. In this way, the chances of appealing to everyone increase. To use different appeals is more efficient also for single targets, since humans often needs to hear a variety of reasons for making big changes, like becoming vegan (Faunalytics, 2007, 2012, 2014). Therefore, including environment in the mix of motivations would be in this respect more efficient than not including it.

Arguments That May Refute the Effectiveness of the Environmental Frame

In this section, I discuss arguments that may provide evidences of inefficacy of the environmental frame for the defense of animals, including the fact that the environment is not a major motivator for change, the implicatory denial and climate change denial, the expectancy motivation theory, the need for ethics to have long-lasting change, the frame being speciesist in itself along with the risk of the loss of integrity, and the incompatibility between animal ethics and environmental ethics.

First, if we are going to use this frame to directly persuade people to become vegan, we face a major disadvantage. Environment is *not one of the major concerns* people mention when asked about their major motivators for becoming vegetarian or vegan. It is in their list of top motivations, but not as important as animal suffering or health. This may be a bias of self-reporting (people may behave differently than what they think).³ But what we know is that, when asked, people point at animal suffering and human health as the main motivators (Faunalytics 2007, 2012, 2014).

Another important drawback is that using environmental messages to reduce animal oppression may have little impact since environmental messages have little success in general because of *implicatory denial*. Implicatory denial is one of the three types of denial identified by Cohen (2001) and which climate change authors use to explain what climate change denial is exactly denying. The first two types, literal and interpretative denials, are directly related to the typical reaction of climate contrarians. Literal denial refers to the sheer denial of the facts and evidence of climate change and interpretative denial refers to the denial of the logical consequences derived from facts and evidence. However, many people and organizations do not deny either the facts, evidence or consequences of climate change yet they do deny the psychological, political, or moral implications that conventionally follow, that is, they hold an implicatory denial. This latter dimension is very important with regard to the solutions adopted (or missed to be adopted) by nondenialists and shows that rejection in the issue of climate change is much more complex than simply pointing at the right-wing denial counter-

³ Self-reporting has many dangers (Hoskin, 2012), including the fact that individuals not always are honest in their responses or may not have introspective ability (they may be honest but lack the ability to provide an accurate response to a question because they do not really know themselves). Furthermore, as Taft (2016) shows for the case of animal advocacy, quality surveys are rare and very often not fully reliable, and very problematic when the participants are meat eaters, which is like asking sexist men about the best way to end violence against women (Taft, 2016).

movement. Even when there is no literal or interpretative denial of the anthropogenic climate change (i.e., when facts of climate change are accepted, and we can see the consequences of them) implicatory denial is a common phenomenon everywhere (we do not deny either the facts, evidence, or consequences of climate change, yet we deny the psychological, political, or moral implications that follow). Thus, we do not react (Cohen, 2001). This inaction for climate change that we see everywhere may neutralize the environmental message regardless what purpose is used for. And actually, implicatory denial may also explain why so many people maintain speciesist habits when they already know they are extremely harmful.

Likewise, using the environmental message, and particularly pointing at climate change, may represent losing in the United States half of the audience, because of the high number of skeptics in this country regarding the anthropogenic causes of global warming. Furthermore, climate change deniers tend to belong to groups that are less likely to go vegetarian, such as the elderly and political conservatives; hence, environment is not a good frame if we want this people to shift toward less speciesist habits. Therefore, the environment message may be dividing regarding climate change when we address communities of people that may include climate change deniers. However, of course, and so far, this mostly applies only to the United States.

The environmental frame used for animal defense might not be effective either if the *expectancy theory* is right. This theory posits that we adapt our behavior to our expectations, and so we usually get what we expect in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (Vroom, 1964). This way, when an animal advocacy organization uses an environmental frame to avoid directly advocating for nonhuman animals, this may reflect that those activists do not believe that the targeted people are sensitive and smart enough to make a conscious change in their behaviors and thus we need to cheat them. This may, in some cases inevitably, lead to manipulative tactics. The public may notice. Our expectations (“they cannot change”) might finally self-fulfil.

The risks exposed by the expectancy theory of motivation actually resonate with the *ideological authenticity* which Freeman (2014) claims is the best advocacy approach to defend nonhumans. By ideological authenticity, this author means that “what is true or authentic to a social movement’s ideology should be expressed as such, in most cases, for integrity and honesty in communication” (p. 226). This argument may apply not only in the case of environmental frames but also to any other frames used as a pretext not to directly advocate against speciesism and for animal liberation. If we do not believe people can really change, we will not produce change of any type. Therefore, according to these theories, if the frame is to be used, it should be with total transparency with regard to our final aims.

Whereas rational arguments are necessary but not enough and emotional arguments are very effective but need to be supported by something else, we have mentioned that ethical arguments seem to be the single type of arguments that guarantee long-lasting change according to research (e.g., Hoffman et al., 2013) and the opinion of several theorists. Ball and Friedrich (2009), for instance, state that “decades of activism have shown us that the cruelty argument is more likely to galvanize people to action than environmental and health arguments” (p. 112). Likewise, Freeman recommends for the case of farmed animals to frame arguments as a problem based on injustice and cruelty and suffering, though this author includes the environmental frame in third position. According to this, if we want the environmental argument to have any chance to produce long-term change, we should be clear that we are using ethical arguments with it. This aligns with the need to avoid the technology risks we mentioned in the previous section. If environment is used as a nonmoral frame, any change (or promise of change) in technology may fix the nonmoral problem and end up with even an increase in suffering (more beings exploited thanks to technology).

Next to this, another major objection to the use of the environmental frame in animal advocacy is related to the criticism made by some members of the animal rights movement to any sort of pretext used to avoid directly advocating for nonhuman animals. This criticism claims that such a strategy only leads to a loss of integrity over the cause and can actually be considered speciesist. On one hand, these arguments go on, if the shift toward veganism is not emphasized as an ethical standpoint, the risk of the environmental frame is that we end up just promoting people to adhere to sustainable lifestyle choices. This way, we will be stuck on the behavioral change, not changing worldviews. According to this, for animal advocacy to be effective, we should directly promote veganism according to its original aim of minimizing harm to others and we should empower people to proudly identify with this aim (Taft, 2016, p. 27). This view accepts no compromise, there is a public moral good that we should stress and that the environmental message does not stress or can only do it marginally (since the focus is not on animal suffering). As the environmental frame cannot provide this emphasis on animal ethics, it can lead to a loss of integrity over the cause.

On the other hand, this approach goes even further when comparing animal liberation with human liberation. Taft (2016), for instance, states that we would never accept argumentative deviations in the case of human oppression (“one need only envision an antidomestic violence campaign that promotes ‘abuse-less Mondays’ or ‘more humane abuse’ to see how some methods of persuasion used for animal advocacy are not logical,” p. 42). This author, a firm opposer of any focus on gradual dietary reductions of animal products, states that we should apply to animal oppressors the same logic we apply to human oppressors. We would never accept an “Abuse-less Monday” for sexual abusers and would tackle the reasons these abusers behave as they behave, instead of trying to distract them with alternative arguments. As Taft (2016) points out, no therapist would find acceptable to suggest to their male patients involved in domestic violence a simple reduction of their violence toward women (p. 42). In this sense, we may infer, to use the environmental frame to reduce animal oppression is a speciesist approach, a distraction we would never accept if humans were the abused.

I find the distraction argument extremely sound. However, I am not sure the deviation that environment represents is as speciesist as the examples provided above. First, Taft’s approach does not consider the fact that many human rights achievements were actually the outcome of a series of small steps (in the form of requests close at some points to Meatless Monday initiatives).⁴ Furthermore, with the environmental frame we have, for instance, the choice to request a full abolition of animal agriculture, just that for reasons other than animal suffering. Also, the fact that human rights organizations are “deviating” in the past decades from their original goals is illustrative. All of the top organizations fighting poverty in developing countries (e.g., UNICEF, Oxfam,

The World Food Program, The United Nations Development Program) have since long expanded its battle fronts to include environmental goals after acknowledging how much connected, poverty, hunger, and climate change are. Of course, they do not conceal that humans are their final aim.

Finally, there is a very important objection that may be made to the use of the environmental frame in animal advocacy. This objection lies in an argument best expounded by Faria and Paez (2017): The fact that animal ethics and environmental ethics have an incompatible core. It is well known that animal ethics, the ethics that deals with human’s treatment of other animals, claim that sentient individuals are fully morally considerable, irrespective of species

⁴ For instance, in the 18th century, during the antislavery campaign in the United Kingdom, the abolitionists promoted a boycott of slave-grown sugar in tea and cakes (Hague, 2008). The campaign was primarily supported by the female antislavery associations and it was ridiculed at the time by many, including the satirist James Gillray (1792), who charged the “anti-saccharites” with hypocrisy.

membership and that our most important moral reasons are given by the interests of sentient individuals. By contrast, environmental ethics claim that at least some nonsentient natural entities have ultimate value (e.g., ecosystems or plant species) and that at least sometimes, the moral reasons to preserve such entities are stronger than the moral reasons given by the interests of sentient individuals. Environmental ethics is mostly anchored in the Land Ethics approach (Leopold, 1949), devoted to preserving the “integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community” (Callicott, 2014, p. 66).

Both approaches, animal and environmental ethics, have been often confused⁵ but entail radically different obligations. While environmentalists think we have moral reasons to perform negative interventions in nature (like the practice of killing animals to preserve an alleged balance in ecosystems or certain plant species), animal ethicists think the opposite, that we always have moral reasons to abstain from performing negative interventions and, by contrast, we have decisive moral reasons to perform positive interventions in nature (like helping animals). This may entail incompatible criteria at the decision-making stage. Therefore, using an environmental frame to defend animals may lead to conflicting situations at any given moment when core values are at play. It could be counterargued in this case that only environmental frames excluding incompatible criteria toward animal ethics must be supported. However, such a thing seems rather difficult in face of all environmental organizations and environmental policies grounded on the Land Ethics approach.

Discussion

The aim of this article was to identify and discuss some of the most important arguments that can be applied to justify or reject the use of the environmental frame to abolish the exploitation of nonhuman animals. Regarding the arguments supporting the use of the environmental frame in animal defense, I have reviewed the lack of information theory, the benefits of frame extension, the minority theory and the benefits of pragmatism, the power of intersecting, the dual quality of the environmental frame, the advantage of the environmental frame allowing for emotional appeals, the impact on attitudes of a change in behaviors, and the effectiveness of targeting all motivations.

As to the arguments rejecting the use of the environmental frame in animal defense, I have revisited the surveys that highlight that environment is not the main motivator for change (including the alert on the many problems of self-reporting that a majority of surveys experience), the implicatory denial, the expectancy motivation theory, the need to appeal to ethics if we want long-lasting changes, the risk of being speciesist and losing integrity, and the incompatibility between animal and environmental ethics.

It is apparent that while my examination has easily provided counterarguments for the main supportive theories, the opposite is true for the list of claims against using the environmental frame. That is, the majority of them are hard to counterargument. Therefore, a first conclusion might be that the arguments against the use of the environmental frame are more robust. Among them, I would stress particularly the problem of nonmoral claims. As we have seen, ethical claims are what usually best guarantee long-lasting changes, and this may be particularly true

⁵ Environmental authors are probably the ones to blame for the original confusion between environmental ethics and animal ethics (the ethics of our treatment of other animals). Influential founders of environmental thinking like Callicott (1980) compared concern for nonhuman animals with environmental approaches in a very delusive way. However, concern for nonhuman animals emerged as a separate public claim from the environmental movement (although some environmentalists could of course contribute to both fields) and, as an academic reflection, it emerged connected to moral philosophers not concerned with environmental issues but with social justice (Regan, 1983; Singer, 1975).

with environmental issues. If only selfish interests are involved, as soon as human ingenuity and technology appear on scene claiming reduction of waste and pollution from dietary habits, people may adhere to those habits regardless whether this means equal or more oppression for other animals. Because of the conflicting core values of animal ethics and environmental ethics this possibility cannot be neglected at all. That is, the environmental frame seems to be particularly ready, because of the prevalence of ecological aims (beyond individual suffering) in environmental ethics, to perpetuate speciesism, and thus animal suffering.

I do not think the above allows us to fully discard environmental arguments to pursue animal liberation, because of the many reasons provided here regarding the benefits of a pluralistic approach. However, if long-lasting behavioral changes are sought, with the aim to produce radical changes in worldviews, it may be wise to use the environmental frame with much prudence combining the best the three main rhetorical pillars have to offer. That is, to remind that even if facts and rationality (*logos*) are very important to build appeals to authority (*argumentum ab auctoritate*), it is very difficult to produce changes without touching the hearts of people, what implies using emotional appeals (*pathos*) that, in their turn, will not last if they are not supported by ethical claims (*ethos*).

However, it is useful to remind that moral claims (in this case animal ethics claims) can also be very counterproductive, because of the hostility they may trigger in people, who often do not like others to preach to them. Therefore, other argumentative resources different from ethics may be useful when moral claims are unrealistic—if only to prepare the terrain for accepting ethical claims.

To this respect, I would like to stress the importance of regulation to help tip the scales. In the examples here mentioned of worldview changes like human slavery or whaling, or of behavioral changes like smoking; in all cases, ethics was the final goal of advocates (including the smoking case, since it was deemed unethical to prevent smokers from knowing that they were killing themselves). However, on all those cases, the primary triggers that started change were nonmoral (war victory, trade interests, and human health) and all them were enforced by regulation.

Inevitably, this article cannot provide a straightforward answer to the question here discussed. That is, whether greening our message is useful for animal liberation.

However, a clever strategy, according to the data reviewed here, may be to maintain a pluralistic approach, very much adapted to the different targets we address, as well as to avoid ecological aims in conflict with animal ethics and include the animal ethical claim in order to keep consistency, authenticity, and expectancy high. That is, to rank high in our advocacy toolkit the claim that to harm other animals is simply ethically *wrong*, regardless how many other collateral benefits and reasons also justify stopping harming them.

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