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REVIEW

Animal ethics in the climate change debates

La ética animal en los debates en torno al cambio climático

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the article examined the lack of inclusion of nonhuman animals in international climate change reports and public policies, especially in bodies such as the IPCC and UNFCCC. Despite recognizing the contribution of extensive livestock farming to greenhouse gas emissions, these institutions omitted interspecies ethical considerations in their mitigation strategies. The research raised the need to debate the role of nonhuman animals in environmental policies and proposed an animal ethics approach for their integration.
Development: the analysis of the IPCC and UNFCCC reports evidenced an anthropocentric bias in the design of climate policies, prioritizing exclusively human welfare. It was argued that this reductionist view has made invisible the moral relevance of animals and their role in the climate crisis. In addition, five possible explanations for their exclusion were discussed, including the lack of political representation of animals and the perception that their welfare is indirectly addressed through biodiversity protection.
Conclusions: it was concluded that it is urgent to reformulate the debate on climate change from an interspecies ethical perspective. Including animals as political subjects in public policies would make it possible to move towards a more holistic and sustainable approach. Finally, it was proposed the adoption of regulatory frameworks that guarantee the protection of animal interests, recognizing them as individuals with rights within the global climate agenda.

Keywords: Climate Change; Animal Ethics; IPCC; Public Policy; Anthropocentrism.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el artículo examinó la falta de inclusión de los animales no humanos en los informes y políticas públicas internacionales sobre el cambio climático, especialmente en organismos como el IPCC y la UNFCCC. A pesar de reconocer la contribución de la ganadería extensiva a las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero, dichas instituciones omitieron consideraciones éticas interespecie en sus estrategias de mitigación. La investigación planteó la necesidad de debatir el rol de los animales no humanos en las políticas ambientales y propuso un enfoque ético animalista para su integración.
Desarrollo: el análisis de los informes del IPCC y la UNFCCC evidenció un sesgo antropocéntrico en el diseño de políticas climáticas, priorizando exclusivamente el bienestar humano. Se argumentó que esta visión reduccionista ha invisibilizado la relevancia moral de los animales y su papel en la crisis climática. Además, se discutieron cinco posibles explicaciones para su exclusión, incluyendo la falta de representación política de los animales y la percepción de que su bienestar se atiende indirectamente mediante la protección de la biodiversidad.
Conclusiones: se concluyó que es urgente reformular el debate sobre el cambio climático desde una perspectiva ética interespecie. Incluir a los animales como sujetos políticos en las políticas públicas permitiría avanzar hacia un enfoque más holístico y sostenible. Finalmente, se propuso la adopción de marcos normativos que garanticen la protección de los intereses animales, reconociéndolos como individuos con derechos dentro de la agenda climática global.

Palabras clave: Cambio Climático; Ética Animal; IPCC; Políticas Públicas; Antropocentrismo.

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INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the international investigations, debates, and discussions held by the IPCC and the UNFCCC regarding advances in the environment, both organizations have produced extensive reports that aim to suggest public policy implementations to tackle climate change. However, it is striking that these reports do not include animal rights or interspecies ethical perspectives, even though these organizations have stated that one of the triggers of the climate crisis is precisely greenhouse gas emissions from extensive livestock farming. The purpose of this project is to open a debate on the place of non-human animals in the construction of public policies to address climate change, not only to detail the aforementioned grave omission but also to propose strategies that allow for the inclusion of considerations in favor of non-human animals from an interspecies ethics perspective in the context of policies, debates and other institutional and social efforts to address climate change.

Based on an analysis of the IPCC and UNFCCC reports, this project will report on the omissions in not including the interests of other species. It will propose, as an alternative, an animal-interspecies ethical approach that allows for and legitimizes a moral consideration of other species in the development of public policies for the environment. Finally, this project will seek to offer solid arguments for a public debate whose practical purpose is the definitive inclusion of animals as political actors within the agenda for discussing and managing climate change.

Some questions that will help us understand and develop the problem are:

Why do the IPCC and the UNFCCC not consider non-human animals in the discussion of climate change? What conditions would allow non-human animals to be integrated as actors in the climate change debates, starting from the possibility of considering an animal ethics approach? How is it possible to integrate animals into international political agendas? What conditions are required for this to happen? What would be the implications of a change of focus that leaves behind the aforementioned "anthropocentric bias" to make way for an animal ethics perspective?

However, the research question intended to be answered as a thesis is the following: How would it be possible to effectively integrate the interests of animals into public policies designed to address climate change to ensure the entire life of human and non-human animals?

The hypothesis of this research is that, based on the understanding that non-human animals are beings with the capacity to feel pain and pleasure, with consciousness and with interests specific to their individuality and, therefore, with the interest of staying alive by avoiding pain, they must be considered in the elaboration of public policies for the protection of non-human animal species and, in that sense, be able to speak inclusively when debating about climate change. This project proposes the focus of interspecies ethics and animal ethics for integration into the political framework for the development of laws and agreements on climate change because interspecies ethics seek to redefine the sociopolitical and socioecological space by including and problematizing relationships and interactions with other species, in order to achieve better cohabitation and coexistence with all beings on the planet.

DEVELOPMENT

Some experts talk about climate change, while others call it a "climate crisis." However, others emphasize the issue's urgency by calling it a "climate emergency." Beyond the valid clarifications, the truth is that climate change is one of the most important problems facing humanity today. As it is a matter of everyday relevance, it is, consequently, a political issue that must be treated as such, that is to say, by public institutions, states, nations, programs, and other institutional efforts that seek to guarantee the well-being of all. A good example of these institutional programs is the IPCC and the UNFCCC, whose main objective is to evaluate information about scientific, technical, and socioeconomic advances on climate change and its causes, repercussions, and mitigation strategies. However, upon reviewing their reports in detail, it is striking that there are no explicit considerations in favor of animal species other than humans, which are also directly affected by global warming. It should be remembered that both organizations are the most important benchmarks for public policy on climate change, which is why hundreds of nations worldwide use their reports to create government measures in their territories. The importance and responsibility of both organizations in developing national and international policies is undeniable, so a broad consideration that is not biased exclusively towards human interests is expected from them. So this lack of attention, intentional or not, results in little or no attention being paid to the care and welfare of non-human animals in programs to address the consequences of this change and deliberately ignores the fact that animal exploitation is the main trigger in the worsening of this change.

Since their inception, both organizations have been responsible for detailing the origin and implications of climate change on Earth, especially its repercussions, and this is where the approach to their work begins to be problematic since, according to their stated objectives, they make it clear that their main interest is to protect ecosystems for the benefit of future generations, that is, for the enjoyment and pleasure of humankind, pure and simple. This bias appears not only in their objectives but also in a large part of their work, whether in reports or research; their focus is centered on the human race and the improvement of life on Earth. In other words, these organizations justify their work to guarantee a better planet for "we-humans" where there seems to be no room for "they-animals." From these observations, one could deduce an anthropocentric bias that informs and guides their political work. By "anthropocentric bias," we mean the arbitrary criterion that seeks to protect the human species above all others, which ends up being subordinated to the "superior" species. It would be doubtful for the aforementioned organizations to deny that climate change does affect non-human animal species. It affects them in that it causes the loss of their vital ecosystems, it affects them because the increase in temperatures leads to an increase in mass deaths, it affects them because it also increases the number of diseases, and all of this exposes them to extinction and the end of their species. Since it is undeniable that climate change directly affects non-human animals, why, then, are they not considered in public policy? Or how could public policies designed to address the issue of climate change overlook the other agents also affected by this crisis? Despite the fact that non-human animals are also

affected by climate change and its consequences, there are no explicit policies within the international public agenda to mitigate the environmental crisis, so these policies are limited, in the sense that due to an anthropocentric bias, they do not consider it relevant to include other species. This absence in the planning and design of public policies not only reflects an anthropocentric approach that ignores the moral relevance of animals in the context of climate change but also renounces from the outset the possibility of including interspecies approaches that allow a broader vision of what collective well-being and cohabitation of the planet means. Failure to include the interests of non-human animals in the planning and development of public policies for climate change can be contradictory when talking about the welfare of the Earth since the Earth, this shared place where the human race lives, is also the living space of millions of species that are threatened every day by human activity, as the IPPC rightly points out in its First Report. Non-human animal species face even more lethal risks than humans themselves, and it is important to discuss this in a public debate, as human activity is the factor most closely related to the impact on their lives and well-being. In this regard, philosophers such as Katie McShane have made valuable criticisms and contributions to include the interests of non-human animals in the political framework. Given the problem described, it is worth asking what conditions would allow non-human animals to be integrated as actors in climate change debates, and a possible answer could come from animal ethics, an interdisciplinary approach that has been debated for decades from many angles the various ways of considering animals as morally relevant beings, but not only in the ethical aspect but also from the political sphere, as suggested by regional authors such as Pablo Suárez (2021), Óscar Horta (2017), Andrea Padilla (2022); or international authors such as Peter Singer (1975), Gary Francione (2015), Katie McShane (2016) and Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2018). Without being alarmist, if the welfare interests of non-human animals are not addressed in the international debates that lead to policies for climate change, the human race will not be able to safeguard its welfare, as there will not be a planet exclusively for humans. It is an undeniable contradiction to seek the environment for humans without considering the other beings that make it up and co-habit with humans. Non-human animals play a predominant role in the protection and life of ecosystems that later serve humans to survive, so if the animal issue is not addressed, there will be no future for anyone.

According to the WHO, climate change is one of the most serious threats to human health, and according to the IPCC, change is happening faster than predicted. The impact is inevitable, and the only thing that can be done at present is, from the political sphere, to design technological, economic, and social strategies to make the impact as manageable as possible. Climate change and the crisis derived from it are not issues of little relevance but quite the opposite; they are realities of current history that affect millions of human and non-human beings to such a degree that their natural habitat and vital space for conservation are destroyed. It would be completely lacking in common sense to adopt denialist positions, such as that of Donald Trump, assuming that climate change is not relevant in public conversations and debates, or much worse, to claim that the crisis does not exist.

Climate change directly causes humanitarian emergencies, forced migration, species extinction, and lethal diseases. Heat, fires, hurricanes, floods, diseases, storms, among other phenomena, are apparent consequences of global warming. Currently, according to the United Nations, more than 4 million people live in a vulnerable situation concerning climate change; every year, we break records for gas emissions and temperatures on Earth; more than 300 000 deaths a year are related to heat stress, malnutrition, and malaria; the costs of climate change in terms of life and existence are incredibly high. It is more urgent than ever to insist on opening a broad debate that considers other approaches to tackling the problem. All international organizations, from the WHO to the United Nations, insist on an anthropocentric response that does not allow for the elucidation of other possibilities of existence beyond the exploitation of the planet by human beings.

In any case, it would be important to accept that these types of organizations, such as the IPCC and the UNFCCC, are built on a particular notion of human development and progress. Therefore, their anthropocentrism is to be expected, in addition to other types of biases that run through discussions on class, economic system, and gender, among other issues of our time. However, and not for this reason, this bias should be perpetuated in the most important debates. On the contrary, it would be valuable if the Academy and the spaces for dissemination and social research were to provide answers and responses to these organizations to initiate a dialogue on the relevance of including non-human animals on the political agenda.

The debate around climate change is more relevant and urgent than ever. Many countries are taking measures to face the crisis. However, at the same time as strategies are being designed to confront it, it is known that in recent years, the loss of the Amazon rainforest has accelerated and that the Lacandon Jungle has lost more than half of its extension. The problem is here; it affects all nations and states, but to a greater extent, those in conditions of poverty, not to mention those non-human animals whose interests have never been taken into account in the history of humanity in policy making. Here, it is important to make clear that this is a political justification, and not so much an ethical one, because as the philosopher Katie McShane states, “Chimpanzees and other non-human animals, however important their moral interests may be, have no representation in the UNFCCC.” (2016, p. 11). So, the debate is political, not ethical. On the ethical issue, it is assumed that there is already a minimum agreement in the scientific community regarding animal consciousness and sentience, as stated in 2012 in the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a pressing need to debate the inclusion of animal interests within the framework of public policies for climate change since these policies, or the absence of them, directly affect them, as in the vast number of cases in which governments undertake the extermination of what they call “invasive species,” without understanding the social, political and historical circumstances that cause these species to migrate to other places. Integrating an animal ethics approach would be pertinent and enlightening for a holistic understanding of the magnitude of the climate crisis, as well as providing new ideas for possible solutions to mitigate the damage caused by extreme changes in the Earth’s temperature and the phenomena that result from it.

This research aims to shed light from the perspectives of animal ethics, as well as interspecies ethics, to renew the debate

on climate change, no longer from an anthropocentric bias that puts humans at the center of interests, but with a broader, more ecological perspective in consideration of the other inhabitants with whom we co-inhabit the planet.

Based on the fact that non-human animals do not feature in the public policies led by the IPCC and the UNFCCC, as stated in "Anthropocentrism in Climate Ethics and Policy" (McShane, 2016), it would be valid to suggest that attention to the care and welfare of non-human animals is lacking in programs to address the consequences of climate change, given that they are also affected by the policies or lack thereof implemented by governments and public institutions. This is evident in the responses and suggestions of these organizations to the current debate on climate change, in which human well-being prevails through regulations to protect biodiversity and ecosystems, but not for non-human animals. Although some of the positions of these organizations cover categories of environmental ethics, they do not allow for the extension of consideration to animal individuality and, therefore, cannot be configured as interspecies ethics or animal ethics. In other words, non-human animals are not categorically included in the plans, programs, and policies of the international organizations responsible for addressing the issue of climate change at the global level.

As stated in the 2012 Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, the most qualified scientists have said that animals are beings capable of feeling pain and pleasure, that their lives can go better or worse, and that their preferences are directed towards preserving themselves and staying away from anything that may cause them pain. So, non-human animals challenge us morally insofar as they have interests, such as staying alive. What prevents states, governments, and institutions from considering their interests in the context of the climate crisis? The truth is that, to date, no panel or convention on climate change has explicitly and not subsidiarily considered the interests of non-human animals.

That said, this research will attempt to argue that these omissions could have five plausible explanations, in line with those proposed by the philosopher Katie McShane (2016), and that these explanations end up indicating something even more serious, and that is that there is an evident anthropocentric bias maintained by international organizations, even when there is already a minimum degree of agreement in a large part of the scientific community about the consciousness and the experiencing of affective states by animals. The explanations for these omissions will be explained in a general way below.

One initial explanation for the failure to integrate animal interests into public policy is that international organizations must maintain a neutral stance; that is, they must remain free of all bias and, therefore, cannot empathize with any ethical formula, whether anthropocentric or not. Both the IPCC and the UNFCCC strive to make progress on climate change based on what all parties more or less agree on. Thus, efforts should be concentrated on consensus, in this case, that human beings have interests, that these matter, and that, consequently, all attention and all planning should go in that direction. However, this does not imply a denial that the interests of non-humans also matter, only that their level of importance is displaced as there is less agreement on this issue.

A second explanation for not including the issue of non-human animals in public discussions on climate change could be that, when talking about biodiversity and how it is affected by the climate crisis, non-human animals are already implicitly included, insofar as they are the first to suffer the effects of the planetary emergency. If we address the issue of this emergency, we would also be addressing the interests of animals, even if they are not explicitly mentioned. However, protecting biodiversity is not the same as protecting the welfare of individual animals since, as McShane (2016) rightly points out, sometimes these efforts in favor of biodiversity involve the forced reproduction of species or the elimination of so-called "invasive species."

A possible third explanation is that the issue of animals is so problematic and complex that it is better not to include it on the agenda, as there are few alternatives and much less consensus. However, here, we would have to appeal again to the consensus on animal emotions established in 2012 in the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness.

A fourth possible explanation analyzed by McShane involves the idea that helping humans implies indirectly helping animals. This assumes that human and non-human interests converge and that, in the case of climate policy, what is good for us is suitable for other animals. Again, it is dangerous to assume such convergence, as it is clear that all species groups have different needs. Finally, another explanation could be that animals have no political representation and, therefore, cannot be considered within the framework of international conventions.

The five explanations presented above seem to point to a single interpretation, namely that these organizations have no interest in seeking the welfare of animals within the international political agenda. This project proposes an alternative to these omissions so that the debate can be renewed and we can discuss the fact that it is not only possible to include animals but also a necessary condition for current policy, even to be able to talk about the welfare of the human race.

Taking the central research question as a framework, an attempt will be made to answer it by renewing the frameworks of understanding of the human and the animal. It will also require cultural work to transform the notion of the human and animal relationship. It may be possible to influence the modification of the mechanisms and procedures of representativeness so that, in a contractual framework, animals are included as subjects of complete and direct rights, taking into account the current availability of information that indicates that other animals are also direct victims of anthropogenic climate change and therefore subjects capable of being protected and welcomed by pacts and public policies without distinction of species. Although non-human animals are not a relevant issue for international organizations that look after the environment and the mitigation of climate change, this could change thanks to the inclusion of an approach to interspecies ethics and even animal ethics, approaches that force us to reconsider the place of humans and animals in the world, where the interests of non-human animals are considered as means to other (human) ends, but as ends in themselves.

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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