

# **Party for Animals: Introducing Students to Democratic Representation of Nonhumans**

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to gauge students' perceptions of the Dutch Party for Animals (PvdD) in order to reflect on the political representation of nonhumans (animals). The support for political representation of nonhumans is based on the ethical underpinning of deep ecology; growing recognition of the importance of sustainability; and increased societal support for animal rights and welfare. This article reflects on these developments using Bachelor students' assignments from a Sustainable Business course, which asked them to reflect on the underlying principles of the PvdD. Student assignments indicate that educational efforts targeted at fostering ecological citizenship have a positive effect on the recognition and acceptance of ecocentric values.

**Keywords:** animal rights; animal welfare; ecological citizenship; sustainability

## **Introduction**

Founded in 2006, The Dutch Party for Animals or PvdD (Partij voor de Dieren) is chaired by Marianne Thieme. The party's focal issues are nonhuman animal welfare, such as stricter video monitoring of animals on farms and a ban on battery cages for laying hens, and sustainability issues, such as renewable energy. Since the creation of the party, stricter laws against animal abuse were introduced and research funding for the conversion of nonhuman animal protein into plant-based protein has increased. PvdD won two seats in the parliamentary elections of 2006. By January 2012, the party had 12,250 members supported by 180,000 voters. Securing a seat in the

European Parliament in 2014 has assured PvdD greater international exposure and recognition. In 2017, PvdD won five seats in Parliament.

The ideological underpinning of PvdD has its roots in “deep ecology,” which prioritizes the non-instrumental or non-utilitarian value of the environment (Naess, 1973). Deep ecologists care about the fate of endangered species not because they have a direct benefit for humanity (e.g., rare plants having useful ingredients for the pharmaceutical industry), but for their own sake. Deep ecology supports ecological justice or justice between species (Baxter, 2005). By contrast, shallow ecology focuses on issues directly related to human welfare, for example, pollution threatening human health or climate change threatening agricultural harvests. Concerns with natural resource depletion usually tend to dominate "mainstream" politics, as it relates to the availability of raw materials for production that stimulates economic growth (Eckersley, 1992; Dobson, 2003; Baxter, 2005). While in some definitions environmental justice may encompass ecological justice (Schlosberg, 2004), environmental justice is most commonly concerned with fairness in the distribution of environmental risks and benefits among people (Kopnina, 2014a; Washington, Taylor, Kopnina, Cryer, & Piccolo, 2017).

The reasons for the increased popularity of the PvdD party are many-fold (Het Parool, 2017). PvdD's growth can be attributed to the development of ideas of ecological citizenship (Dobson, 2003) and eco-democracy (Eckersley, 1992; Gray & Curry, 2016). Eco-democracy is based on inclusive pluralism, which recognizes nonhuman representation as part of democratic processes (Kopnina & Gjerris, 2015; Kopnina & Cherniak, 2016), drawing inspiration from both ecocentric philosophies (e.g., Rolston, 1983) and animal rights/welfare ethics (Singer, 1977; Regan, 1986).

While deep ecology recognizes intrinsic values in environmental systems that sustain ecological integrity, the animal welfare and rights focus is on the intrinsic value of particular animals. Animal welfare concerns are recognized in societies (Singer, 1977; Regan, 1986), but animal rights are not widely accepted in politics and law (e.g., Baxter, 2005; Bisgould, 2014; Sykes, 2016). Animal welfare and rights are not instrumental to human welfare; they require recognition of nonhuman animals' intrinsic value independent of human interests.

Admittedly, there are some tensions between deep ecology, ecocentrism, and sustainability on the one hand and animal welfare/rights on the other. These tensions, outlined by Callicott (1980), are concerned with the tradeoffs involved in the preservation of species and

habitats and the question of whether ecosystems should take precedence over individual members of species. For example, while invasive species might need to be controlled to preserve the diversity of native ecosystems, from an animal rights/welfare point of view, no individuals should be sacrificed. In a similar way, environmental sustainability may at times be incompatible with animal welfare; for example, the free-range cattle or chicken requires larger territory and involves a longer lifespan, which may be bad for the environment because more land is needed.

Callicott's (1980) essay caused criticism since it was seen as divisive. It was noted that most tradeoffs between animal welfare and environmental sustainability or ecological integrity are due to industrial expansion (Vieira, 2016; Washington et al., 2017). Callicott (1988) consequently revised his article, arguing that unity between perspectives is strategically important for advancing the cause of conservation of habitats and their inhabitants. Most of these tensions are not noticed in society, as environmentalists, animal rights activists, and conservationists are often conceptually lumped together (Kahn, 2010). While not underplaying the differences in perspectives, significant points of agreement between animal rights/welfare and environmental ethics are also present. Perry and Perry (2008), Cafaro and Primack (2013), Crist (2013), Waldau (2013), Kopnina and Gjerris (2015), and Vieira (2016) have noted that these various perspectives can be reconciled in their explicit critique of anthropocentrism and growing recognition of intrinsic value attributed both to the entire ecosystems and their individual inhabitants. The growing popularity of the PvdD and similar parties globally can be also understood in light of this recognition across borders and social classes.

While political participation and party preferences differ according to gender, education level, and place of origin (Gaiser, De Rijke, & Spannring, 2010), generally young people are at the forefront of animal rights/welfare and environmental issues (Jerolmack, 2003). Surprisingly, human-nonhuman animal relationships have so far not attracted much interest in the political sciences (Grant & Jungkunz, 2016) or among educational scientists (Spannring, 2015). There has been little research on what factors influence political and/or student beliefs about the treatment of nonhuman animals (Erlanger & Tsytsarev, 2012; Grant & Jungkunz, 2016). This lack of interest is especially surprising, as the strong impact of education and socialization on the continuous cultural reproduction of human-nonhuman animal relationships suggests a rich and important research area for both animal studies and educational science (Spannring, 2015).

This article aims to explicate connections to animal rights/welfare and environmental sustainability on the basis of student perceptions of the PvdD. The students' views of the PvdD reveal whether the political messaging in channeling growing recognition of environmental sustainability and the ethical treatment of nonhuman animals is effective. Student opinions matter in terms of the larger politics of knowledge production not only because they are themselves potential voters (Dutch voting age is 18), but also because of their ability to engage with and sometimes influence other generations' perceptions (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Gaiser et al., 2010). Assuming that international students represent a microcosm of global (educated) citizens, this research is intended to gauge students' perceptions of the issues associated with the political representation of animals. While this study does not have an explicit pedagogical aim of getting students to care about animals, exploration of students' understanding of animal rights/welfare and environmental sustainability is instructive in strategic recommendations for developing ecological citizenry.

## **Materials and Methods**

The case studies explored here include two occasions wherein the students enrolled in the Sustainable Business minor at the International Business faculty of The Hague University of Applied Science (HHS) were taught by the lecturer and author of this article. Assignments were written by two different groups of students in 2013 and 2014 as part of the Guest Speaker's module of the minor. In 2013, there were 23 international students (about 40% Dutch, of whom some were mixed in terms of race and ethnicity), with a roughly equal male/female ratio, between the ages of 20 and 23. The students were asked to look at the PvdD website, which includes videos and press and news releases and reflect on whether they would vote for the party. In 2014, there were 25 students with a similar demographic composition to the first group who listened to a presentation by PvdD leader Marianne Thieme and were then asked to write a reflection.

The lecturer followed the European Commission's code of research ethics with regard to data protection in qualitative research (Iphofen, n.d., p. 42). The assignments were pasted without personal identifiers into a separate file while identifying information was kept in a separate password-protected file.

Thematic content analysis, the process of identifying themes and gathering examples of those themes from the text (Burnard, Gill, Steward, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008), was used for transcript analysis. The anonymous documents were searched for recurrent topics, which were color-coded and arranged in themes. Consequently, each of the color-assigned categories was cut and pasted together with subject dividers labeled above the corresponding colored snippets. Different themes discussed in student assignments are presented below.

### **Presenting 2013 Assignments**

Summarizing the party platform, one student wrote that the website describes the history of the organization, main goals, and who is in charge of implementing these goals. It describes the ways individuals can “stand up for the rights for animals.” The student noted that PvdD’s main focus is on the bio-industry where animals are treated as “just a product” or “just as economic means.” The party was described by the student as a “pacemaker” in the parliament meaning that “they encourage other parties to [empathize] with animal welfare” by serving vegetarian meals for guests of the parliament, for example. The party strives for the “creation of a society where animals are respected as lively creatures,” wanting “to stop animals from being the victims of economic gains.”

Another student noted that the party focuses on the welfare of nonhuman animals “without any means of violence like other environmental activists.” In reflecting on the PvdD’s main slogan, “Hold on to your ideals,” this student wrote: “By this they mean: Animal welfare, agriculture, environment, sustainability, climate change, energy.” Another student illustrated: “They take Gandhi as [a] guideline; he said that the greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” PvdD believes that nonhuman animals “should be treated with dignity as living, breathing and feeling creatures.” Another student wrote:

They claim we do not see animals as beings with souls but just as products. The party calls for legislation to protect animals, they argue that by having a party just for animals will keep them on the political agenda as the rest of the parliament is made up of politicians representing the human agenda.

This student also commented on the party’s Manifesto:

Being from the UK and seeing how [W]esternized we have become and [having] almost lost a sense of culture, I believe not enough is done by the political parties around the world to respect nature. The PvdD say: “The respect for the physical and mental integrity of all life on Earth provides the basis for a more peaceful way for humans to interact with

each other, animals and nature in general.” This statement is very powerful. For hundreds of years generations of people managed to live without supermarkets and mass production but as time has gone on, the way we treat animals has changed: we no longer live alongside animals, we see animals as a product.

A few students reflected that initially, it was hard to take PvdD seriously:

This name causes me to believe that this is a one-issue party, whose sole purpose is to increase living standards for animals and make everyone a vegetarian. Obviously, this is not the case, but I think that the name scares people off.

The existence of the Dutch Animal Party was an unexpected surprise, after which I wanted to exclaim, “Seriously???” It seemed that it is absurd.

PvdD’s rise in popularity was explained by a student to be due to the “passion and enthusiasm” and the “charisma” of the party’s leader, as well as its broader political base:

By ensuring that current legislation on animals is followed, the party acts as a political watchdog for animal rights. They also act [as] a pacemaker, inspiring animal rights within politics, as no politician likes to be known as someone who doesn’t like animals. This allows them to have a larger voice in Parliament than their small physical presence permits.

Many students felt that the party does not address broader social and economic concerns, which they saw as more important:

From my perspective, the only people who would vote for this party are vegetarians who dedicate their life to animal welfare. This would mean that the party has pretty much reached its ceiling, because the number of people who think like this is not likely to increase any time soon.

This party does not have a definitive stance on other economic or political subjects. People care more and more about animals’ right[s], but they are also concerned about the economic and political situation.

While they seem to follow the right causes, it is not really clear what else they support. Other important questions regarding retirement support, health plans, taxes, and economic actions are all big points that I as a voter would like to be informed about. Without knowing where the party stands regarding those topics, it will be hard for anyone to give them their vote.

One student found that PvdD was too radical:

Personally, I wouldn't vote for the party of the animals, because they are a one-issue party, which only comes up for the rights of animals. No humans are involved in any plans. I think that it would be much better to implement an animals department into each "normal" political party. I also found them quite radical and exaggerated, because they came up with some insane plans.

Another student thought it "rather strange that this political party gets a say in [pension, taxes, and student loans] when they have not established their position and guidelines regarding these issues." Another noted: "Animal rights is a very specific and limited focus, which completely disregards larger issues such as national security, and economic development." One student disagreed that nonhuman animals are the party's only focus:

PvdD mainly cares about animal welfare, but that is not their only concern. Their broader goals contain a society in which sustainability and compassion take the main stage. They address the destruction of our living environment, the extinction of plant and animal species and the unequal distribution of wealth, which means that a large proportion of the world's population lives in poverty.

One student concluded his paper by saying that "test animals in laboratories, meat factories, fishing for fun, hunting as a sport and animals as entertainment in zoos or circuses – all those things are relicts from former times and should be abolished in a modern, educated age like ours."

A few students reflected that support for the PvdD in The Netherlands is possible because it is a rich society:

PvdD could become a serious player on the "political stage" only in the developed [W]estern countries, where the welfare and living standards are very high. In developing countries, for example, African countries w[h]ere human rights are still a big issue, this would be unimaginable.

As long as there are still people starving to death every day and countless are victims of human trafficking, the leading power in those countries should try to solve those problems first.

The question of whether to vote for PvdD remained ambiguous for some students:

Personally, I would not vote for the PvdD. Solely because they do not have clear points in their program about issues, mostly financially, that affect me directly as a Dutch citizen.... However, I do agree with most of their views and I truly admire their mission.

While most politicians and indeed most people, in general, find animal rights important, it is in the back of our minds and the back of the political agenda... While I respect and agree with the sentiments for which the PvdD stands, I would not vote for them... While I am and always will be an animal lover, and think they should be treated humanely, I am not a vegetarian, I wear leather and use products tested on animals, and I also believe that one vote is far too important to use simply on a party that deals exclusively with animals and does not extend their focus to the alleviation of human suffering.

I am more concerned about the economic and political choices. A party that focuses on only one aspect of the issues that the world is currently facing is not enough. PvdD for me is a great step towards a more respectful and sustainable world, but they are too focused on a particular topic. They can make the political world care about animal rights, and it is a good move.

It may sound egoistic, but it is just what is our human nature – our own good comes first.

Of 23 students (some not being Dutch citizens, but asked hypothetically), only four indicated that they would vote for PvdD, seven indicated that they would if all their concerns were met, and the majority stated that they would not.

### **Presenting 2014 Assignments**

The party's success in recent years was noted by almost half of the students. PvdD leader Marianne Thieme's presentation, according to one student, offered "different perspective towards sustainability issues." Many enjoyed Thieme's "passion for the cause."

I found Marianne[']s work really inspiring and wonderful. She fights for what she believes in and is not afraid of taking the bull by the horns to get attention. Her presentation made me really think about how humans treat animals and how I encourage this treatment by buying meat.

The students noted that due to a documentary about industrial livestock farming," Thieme decided to stop eating beef. A student reflected that factory farming causes "problems for the whole planet" and that "animal welfare relates to bigger issues such as destruction of our environment, extinction, and unequal distribution of wealth." Another student reacted to a short video about farm animals:



The movie presented the ways [in which] mega farms are treating animals [during] capture [in] slaughterhouses, and [it showed] a cow with a hole in her stomach. I do believe these videos were shown with an intention to draw class attention to the existing issue of unacceptable conditions. In politics, emotions can't take place, but this is exactly an issue of emotions that is driven by human ethics. She claimed that there is a wide variety in [the ways] we find things ethical and unethical, but some treatments are unacceptable by anyone.

Four students were impressed by facts and numbers listed by the presenter:

She then gave us some facts saying that there are over 500 million animals killed each year on farms, 600,000 used for experimental purposes and that one kilo of meat uses 7 kilos of grain, which results in an 80% loss of protein.

If all Dutch people ate meat only 1 day a week, it would save 3.2 megatons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

The example she gave us was if you want to produce one kilogram of beef, you need 300 litres of water. That all multiplied by the endless demand of the consumers and rising population growth can lead to the depletion of water [and] fuel, and pollution can be considered a threat.

I did not know that there is a direct interrelationship between the food and the climate change because I associated climate change with industries. I was also a bit shocked about animal conditions, for example, the fact that chickens are fattened so fast and not able to live longer than six weeks. This shows me [it is] necessary to increase public awareness for [a] sustainable future.

One of the students was surprised by the “naïve reaction” of his classmates being “shocked by facts”:

But this shows us the necessity of a party like PvdD to increase public awareness. This party has an outstanding possibility to teach consumers of meat to see groceries ... as a result of various processes like cultivating, slaughtering cattle and packaging. There are many processes causing pollution and depletion.... Deforestation will lower our own standard of life ... I really appreciate and support her intentions. The message came across clearly and I might consider voting for such a party.

Another student stressed that the party was not only good for nonhuman animals but also for people:

Mrs. Thieme['s] last statement was that people are recognizing that a good PvdD [for] the environment is a good party for people as well!

The students noted that the party has been going through “hard times to prove any legitimacy and need of this sort of party in politics, and the party has been bullied in social networks and television.” Issues such as banning round fish bowls, circus animals, and docking horsetails, and the policing of domestic animal abuses have earned the party the name “guinea pig police.”

One student highlighted anthropocentrism as the main concern of the party, stating: “It is necessary that we protect weaker creatures and hav[e] less man-centered thinking.” Another student reflected that most politicians are “just concentrating on the benefit of humans and the view that [the] human is the centre of the world.” Two students picked up on a more ambitious ideological underpinning of the party, “liberation of animals as the next step of human development”:

PvdD might become a new political movement comparable to the movement against slavery, or the woman rights [movement]. She [Thieme] argued that these movements were initially small and being disrespected by the political competitors.

For Marianne, her party is similar to those against human slavery or [for] better wom[en’s] conditions.

As in 2013, one student thought that the party was a “one-issue party”:

I personally think that party as such should not be part of the governance of the Netherlands. It is nice that there is someone to fight for animal rights, but taking part in politics is another thing. In addition, in my opinion, it should be the aim of every single party to work sustainably.

Some doubts about the involvement of the party in social and economic issues persisted: “It is unclear what kind of positions the party has in terms of economy or foreign policy.” As opposed to established parties, PvdD was described by a student as a “one-billion-and-more issues party,” as it speaks for billions of nonhumans. One student commented, “it is one species (human) politics that are one-issue politics.”

One student wrote that he was initially skeptical, as he expected it to have “opinions about animal rights, and no knowledge on how to run a country.” After the lecture, he considered voting for the party, noting that reduction in meat consumption can have broad socio-cultural benefits:

Eating less meat would also enable us to provide food for more people on our planet, secure fresh water, and air, and prevent diseases caused by the mass production of animals in so-called factory farms. Additionally, biodiversity will be preserved. Not only is the excessive consumption of meat a problem, but also deforestation and pollution.

A few students reflected that they felt alienated by the party's focus on vegetarianism. Another student stated:

The reality is cruel. [E]ven after knowing, I am still a meat lover until the day comes that a meat substitute with the same flavor as meat [is created], I will [not] be happy to stop eating meat. I am no professional bodybuilder, but I do love spending some time in the gym and eating right. If I stop eating meat, I would not have the energy to continue exercising plus I would feel very weak and [un]motivated.

Students noticed that while animal welfare is the party's special focus, another big issue is sustainability. One student remarked that using an emotional appeal to "giv[e] animals a voice" was less effective than "developing more sustainable meat production practices and farming methods." Three students reflected on the party's effectiveness in getting their message across:

The support provided by other political parties for propositions made by the PvdD is impressive, from a single issue party to a more diverse and mature party. However, a large part of the achievements is still related to the food industry's treatment of animals. Most of this is related to sustainability, promoting a higher level of corporate social responsibility (CSR). This might "rub off" on other industries and political parties, leading to stricter regulations concerning CSR.

I appreciate her [Thieme's] amusing ways of getting attention for problems, using media attention to promote initiatives on the field of sustainability. I think awareness about environmental issues is an important part to work [on] regarding the improvement of our planet, so I certainly think that ... politicians use media attention to promote sustainable solutions or to point out problems.

Thieme's passion has encouraged many people to fight [for] and support animal rights, not only in the Netherlands but also in other countries. It is good ... to show society that not everything [t]hat is happening around us is "normal." Only together we can reach some changes. However, it is very hard to get support from other parties where the animals are not [the] priority for everybody.

Some students found the party too extreme:

Marianne's apparent desire to get rid of all the "megastallen" (industrial farms) seems a bit drastic. Having these mega farms is needed to prevent an unnecessary import of animal meat. I don't think getting completely rid of them is a good idea, especially with the limited space in the Netherlands and the amount of meat demanded by the population. I do agree that a drastic change has to come concerning the "megastallen," since they are inhumane, polluting, and increase risks for diseases outbreaks. But establishing clear and strict rules to ensure a good quality of life for the animals, and to ensure ... more sustainable food production seems like a better solution.

There are no secrets that animals are living in bad conditions, torture, making experiments and many other things. However, I can totally understand why it is happening like this. If there is demand, then you need supply. Farmers are just doing what society is asking for.

Other students reflected that the PvdD is a uniquely Western phenomenon:

The animals are not the priority especially in circumstances like this when in many countries [there] are still economic cris[e]s and people trying to [make] money.

Of course, in countries like the Netherlands or Germany, the government starts concentrating on other issues than financial or social ones because those countries do good enough.

## **Reflection**

### ***One-Issue or Billion-Issues Party?***

It is apparent from both the 2013 and 2014 assignments that for many students, socio-economic priorities were considered to be normative. Some students felt that the party should be involved in "human" issues and/or should do more to expand and incorporate socio-economic issues (e.g., "I am not convinced of their competencies and expertise in those fields") to avoid the "one-issue" focus. The "one-issue" framing is typical of those who want to promote the flourishing of socio-ecological systems but might be hesitant to support a party they perceive as single-mindedly pursuing animal rights/welfare at the expense of other aspects of socio-ecological systems. Similarly, one might be against a party they perceive as caring about the single issue of human rights or welfare since they think that the "rights" concept is discriminatory toward other nonhuman beings left outside of it.

The convergence of human and environmental interests (e.g., "Deforestation will lower our own standard of life"; "Factory farming causes problems for the whole planet") was better understood after the 2014 lecture. Thieme's lecture helped to outline PvdD's strategic focus on the human benefits of environmental protection, as students easily recognized this interdependency ("Eating less meat would also enable us to provide food for more people on our planet").

However, while sustainability issues related to emissions, pollution, climate change, and food production, are easily understood, appreciation of the intrinsic value of the environment and animals still needs development. PvdD's prioritizing of animal welfare can be seen as a unique attempt to bring intrinsic value ethics into politics. The key to strategic communication that strengthens the ecocentric framework (e.g., Washington et al., 2017), ecological justice (Baxter, 2005) and eco-democracy (Eckersley, 1992; Gray & Curry, 2016) is that it appeals both to reason (e.g., sustainability-related facts) and emotion (e.g., dismay at perceived injustice) as previously employed by civil liberation movements.

### ***Top-Down or Bottom-Up Sustainability?***

The conflict between the party's ideas and students' meat consumption looms large, raising issues of individual responsibility (bottom-up) versus collective (top-down) regulation (Isenhour, 2010) with regard to consumption choices. While some students critically weigh their own consumption options, others rely on the government or scientists to invent artificial meat (e.g., "Until the day comes that a meat substitute with the same flavor as meat [is created], I will [not] be happy to stop eating meat"). Students have recognized that production decisions are due to market demand ("Farmers are just doing what society is asking for"). However, students recognized that established parties "win elections and dominate [the] political agenda by helping corporations." Indeed, since the consumers' sphere of influence is limited to committed minority groups, governments and corporations rely on consumer responsibility to avoid making unpopular regulatory decisions limiting consumption (Isenhour, 2010). This David-and-Goliath relationship between a conscious consumer and political establishment is one of the topics that need to be further articulated in strategic environmental education.

### ***Western or Universal Phenomenon?***

Students disagreed on whether support for animals is a universal or culture-specific phenomenon. Some students discussed the fact that care for animals is a Western phenomenon (e.g., “PvdD could be established ... in the developed Western countries”). One student noted, however, that it is actually the Western values that alienate individuals from more compassionate cultural traditions (e.g., “we have ... almost lost a sense of culture ... the way we treat animals has changed, we no longer live alongside animals, we see animals as a product”). Another student noted that in the past, animals were used as objects – a practice which “should be abolished in a modern, educated age like ours.” As for the cultural conditioning of the majority of students, the media representation of nonhuman animals in The Netherlands is largely anthropocentric (for an overview, see Kopnina, 2014b). Despite this conditioning, the majority of students in each class have expressed support or at least understanding regarding some non-anthropocentric ideas.

### **Discussion**

In the 2014 assignments, more students recognized that “not everything [t]hat is happening around us is ‘normal.’” While the realization of ethical responsibility toward the environment or nonhuman animals independent of human interests (deep ecology, animal rights) remained marginal, many students recognized that the party critiques instrumentalism in relation to nonhuman animals (e.g., they “see animals as beings with souls”). However, others saw anthropocentrism as normative (“it is ... our human nature – our own good comes first”). Yet as one student recognized, human rights and minority liberation also had to be “learned” (e.g., “these movements were initially small and ... disrespected by the political competitors”). This implies there is a large role that education can play in accentuating ecocentric elements of sustainability.

Some students perceived the party’s focus on animal welfare as a minor issue falling under the greater umbrella of sustainability. Indeed, concerns about nonhuman animals, other species, and ecosystems, as well as society, can be mutually complementary (Perry & Perry, 2008; Waldau, 2013; Kopnina & Gjerris, 2015). Both environmental integrity (sustainability) and the treatment of nonhumans (ethics) were understood by some students to converge (shallow

ecology, animal welfare). After Thieme's lecture, the students were more prepared to recognize tradeoffs and commonalities between social and environmental issues. Pedagogically, engaging with complexity and hard choices can be effective in motivating students in discussing human-nonhuman interactions.

In line with research conducted on attitudes toward animal rights and environmental values, it appears that individual perceptions or personalities, rather than social class or income, influence attitudes (Jerolmack, 2003; Erlanger & Tsytsarev, 2012; Kopnina, 2015a). Assuming that international students represent a microcosm of (cosmopolitan, educated) citizens, understanding individual motivations and reasoning through an assignment or in-class discussion was a good starting point for developing non-anthropocentric values in students. One future direction could be an in-class exploration of why the media emphasizes the importance of economic growth as a positive aim, but rampant disappearances of wild habitats go unnoticed.

Effective rhetoric of environmentalism is crucial for the education targeted at the development of ecological citizenship. It is clear from the 2013 assignments that the party's website did not convince most students of the party's relevance to "human issues." Making human dependency on nature more explicit could be one such pedagogical strategy.

Consistent with Gruen (2015), in the current taxonomy of power, women are also often animalized when viewed or referred to as pieces of meat. If the new generation of ecological citizens is taught that it is no longer acceptable to treat nonhuman animals "like animals" (meaning in common parlance, as dumb objects) and violate and kill them, the animalization process that serves to justify structures of dominant power would be weakened. This can inspire curriculum attuned to critical pedagogy, drawing on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), and extending support to activist students who promote nonhuman animal and earth liberation as well as other radical social movements (Kahn, 2010).

It is worth noting that one of the critiques of the field of animal studies is that it is implicitly hierarchical (Gruen, 2015). Gruen (2015) summed it up as the perception that "white people care more about lions than black people, people care more about black men than black women, people care more about wild animals than captive animals, people care more about killings than daily suffering from poverty, violence, and hate, and so on" (p. 1). It appears as some students perceive it, that in prioritizing nonhuman animals over human lives, the party neglects histories of difference that shape both human and nonhuman lives. Pedagogically,

therefore, it is important to point out that environmental activism is widespread and certainly not only a Western phenomenon, and stress the intersections of oppression through discussion of colonialism, race, and class.

According to international opinion surveys, environmentalism and concern with animal welfare are exceptions to postmaterialist values (Dunlap & York, 2008; Kopnina, 2015a). There is also evidence that poor people actually care more about the environment because of its degradation (e.g., water pollution, deforestation) affects their immediate livelihood (Dunlap & York, 2008). Also, the poor buy nonhuman animal-friendly products because they can empathize with others in the same disadvantaged or vulnerable situation (Deemer, 2015). While the “postmaterialist values” theory assumes that the poor cannot “afford” to care about other animals or the environment (Inglehart & Flanagan, 1987), there is mounting evidence that caring for the environment in general and for nonhuman animals in particular is not just a “rich-world” phenomenon (Dunlap & York, 2008). Biophilia or the “innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms” and commitment to environmental causes appear to be a cross-cultural universal phenomenon (e.g., Wilson, 1984; Kellert & Wilson, 1995).

Generally, perceptions of how domestic or farm animals are treated vary between rich and poor, urban and rural areas, but they are also influenced by religious and cultural views and political affiliations (Jerolmack, 2003; WUR, 2009). The voters of over 18 political parties for nonhuman animals around the world are demographically heterogeneous (AWF, n.d.).

As some students interpreted the PvdD’s platform as “radical,” an extended class discussion as to how radical ideas are formed can be helpful. However, lecturers need to be careful in how they frame their messages with regard to unsustainable practices or nonhuman animal suffering. Kahn (2010) and Kopnina (2014c, 2015b) examined how ideas (although certainly not the methods) of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) or Animal Liberation Front (ALF) can inspire active citizenship and critical thinking in students. Another strategy to consider is making the link between social liberation movements and animal welfare more explicit. Indeed, as Crist and Kopnina (2014) wrote:

Animals have been killed, persecuted, enslaved, forced to flee to ever more remote places, and driven to regional or total extinction. In [a] similar fashion, certain humans have been labeled as an animal, subhuman, or savage and often endured subjugation and genocide. Briefly, wild nature, wildlife, and “inferior” people have been subjected (and continue to be subjected) to incremental and large-scale physical dislocations. (p. 388)



While radical eco-pedagogy (Kahn, 2010) may be too controversial, the question remains whether teaching in (to use a student's words) "amusing ways of getting attention for problems" is sufficient for re-orientation towards less anthropocentric ideals. In this respect, educational efforts can start with a "safe" introduction to a "legitimate" party such as PvdD to lead to a better understanding of eco-democracy, in an effort to institutionalize and legitimize environmental protection and animal rights/welfare issues within national policies (Bisgould, 2014), establishing animal rights law (Borràs, 2016; Sykes, 2016) and laws against ecocide (Higgins, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

In examining student perceptions of the PvdD, the ambiguous position of non-anthropocentric ethics and political representation of nonhumans arises. Framing PvdD as a "billion-issues party," the realization of the power structures in environmental decision-making or the recognition of the universality of biophilia could serve as starting points of non-anthropocentric education. Educational scientists and practitioners could consider both cognitive (e.g., sustainability facts) and effective (e.g., "liberation" rhetoric) strategies that influence students' beliefs about environmental protection and/or the treatment of nonhuman animals.

Considering the novelty of having a political party representing the interests of nonhumans necessitated larger reflection on the importance of education targeted at developing ecological citizenship and inclusive pluralism (Kopnina & Cherniak, 2016). Assuming that individual factors rather than national differences play a role in attitudes toward environmental protection and animal rights/welfare (e.g., Erlanger & Tsytarev, 2012), exposure to such ideas, such as a lecture about the PvdD as reported here, can reveal individual differences in perception. Strategic pedagogy targeted at the development of ecocentric and animal rights/welfare values needs to target individual students' rationale and emotions.

Considering that anthropocentric politics are normative, and that shallow ecology is entrenched, educational efforts targeted at the development of ecocentric values that combine concerns about sustainability and ethics are needed. While student assignments demonstrate engagement and critical thinking, the overarching ethical, political, and legal support for nonhumans requires continuous education that encourages a shift of what is now seen as marginal

or radical ideas embodied by the PvdD into a place of greater recognition and acceptance. The PvdD itself has this educational capability. Employing rhetoric that makes a convincing case as to why the PvdD is indeed a “billion-issues” party and why environmental and animal rights activists should be seen as pioneers of societal change needs further work in educational practice.

The transient norms implicit in the student assignments might be productively questioned with similar rational and emotional arguments that supported the civil rights movements (which challenged the injustice of the hierarchical system) – in this case, anthropocentrism would be questioned (Kahn, 2010; Kopnina, 2014c, 2015b).

This study assumed that the exploration of young people’s worldviews reveals larger patterns in environmental awareness and political socialization (Andolina et al., 2003). While in common discourse, sustainability is a mixed bag of issues ranging from climate change to poverty alleviation and good working conditions for laborers (Kopnina & Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015), in this exploration, the less exposed aspect of non-anthropocentric ethics in relation to sustainability was addressed. In order to advance knowledge and understanding of the relationships between humans and other animals, education explicitly targeted at the development of non-anthropocentric values could help shape progressive ethics and political preferences that engage nonhuman representation.

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