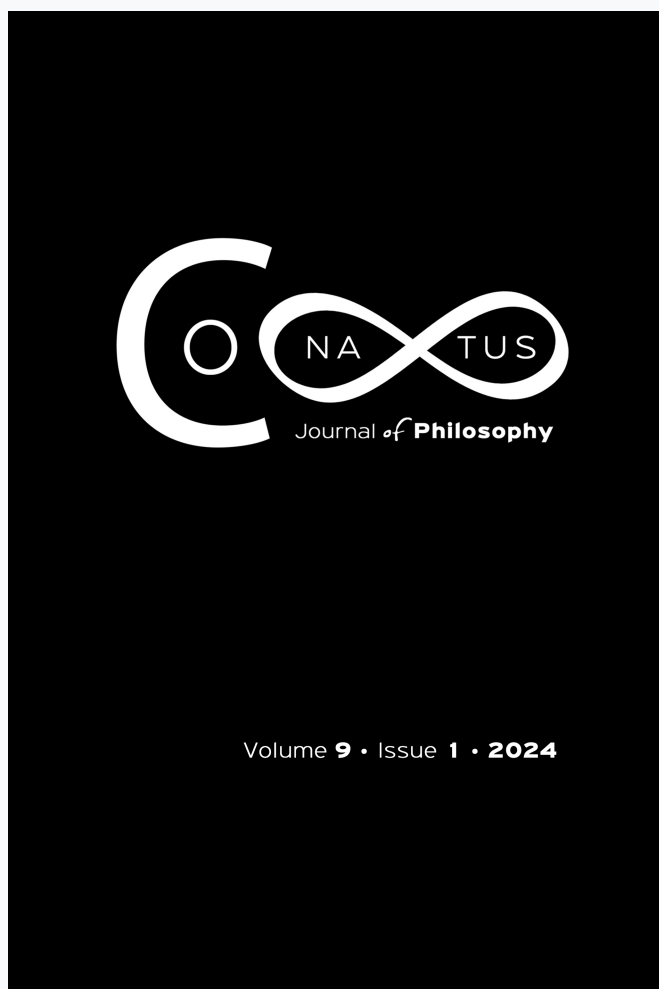


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Grušovnik, Tomaž, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, eds. *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021

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#### **Abstract**

*Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze* edited by Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, stands as a groundbreaking work that delves into the intricate phenomenon of denialism, a critical barrier in addressing ecological crises and advancing animal rights. Through its compelling interdisciplinary lens, the book dissects the psychological, sociocultural, and political underpinnings of denial, challenging entrenched anthropocentric views. This review provides a critical analysis of the book and highlights its pivotal role in bridging theoretical ethics with real-world environmental and animal welfare challenges. The editors' adept selection of contributions guides readers through a thought-provoking journey in denialism, encompassing personal introspection, societal critique, and a scrutinizing look at economic, political, and legal frameworks. Despite its primarily Western-centric perspective, the book is essential in advocating for a broader, more inclusive global dialogue in future research. The book emerges not just as an academic text but as an urgent call to action, resonating with scholars, policymakers, and activists. In essence, this work emphasizes the necessity for a transformative shift in how we perceive and interact with the natural world and its non-human inhabitants.

**Keywords:** animal welfare; anthropocentrism; denialism; environmental ethics; interdisciplinary approach; paradigm shift; psychological barriers; societal norms

## I. Introduction

In an era fraught with environmental crises and escalating debates over animal rights, the book *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting our Gaze* edited by Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, presents a timely and crucial exploration of denialism, emphasizing its pivotal role in exacerbating these issues by obstructing awareness and necessary action.<sup>1</sup>

Denialism represents a refusal to acknowledge established facts, often despite substantial evidence. It is often characterized by rhetorical strategies that stimulate debate, obscuring truths across various domains, including science and history.<sup>2</sup> This deliberate rejection, motivated by factors ranging from psychological to economic, significantly shapes public policy and opinion, obstructing progress in critical areas like environmental protection.<sup>3</sup>

Ubiquitous in its reach, denialism is underpinned by cognitive mechanisms like dissonance and reinforced by sociopolitical structures. Its presence in public health, evidenced by vaccine hesitancy, poses risks to communal well-being.<sup>4</sup> In education, evolution denialism challenges scientific curricula, substituting ideological narratives for empirical science.<sup>5</sup> Historical denialism, such as Holocaust negationism, represents not only a misinterpretation but an intentional distortion of facts, often driven by ideological beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

The realms of animal and environmental ethics are not immune to denialism's effects. Society's dismissal of climate change and animal sentience, despite clear evidence to their existence,<sup>7,8</sup> poses a significant eth-

<sup>1</sup> Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, eds., *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Pascal Diethelm and Martin McKee, "Denialism: What Is It and How Should Scientists Respond?" *European Journal of Public Health* 19, no. 1 (2009): 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> Olli Herranen, "Understanding and Overcoming Climate Obstruction," *Nature Climate Change* 13 (2023): 500-501.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory A. Poland and Ray Spier, "Fear, Misinformation, and Innumerates: How the Wakefield Paper, the Press, and Advocacy Groups Damaged the Public Health," *Vaccine* 28, no. 12 (2010): 2361-2362.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Plutzer, Glenn Branch, and Ann Reid, "Teaching Evolution in U.S. Public Schools: A Continuing Challenge," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 13, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>6</sup> Jan Grabowski and Shira Klein, "Wikipedia's Intentional Distortion of the History of the Holocaust," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 37, no. 2 (2023): 133-190.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Lynas, Benjamin Z. Houlton, and Simon Pery, "Greater than 99% Consensus on Human Caused Climate Change in the Peer-Reviewed Scientific Literature," *Environmental Research Letters* 16, no. 11 (2021).

<sup>8</sup> Heather Browning and Walter Veit, "The Sentience Shift in Animal Research," *The New Bio-*

ical challenge. The repercussions of such denialism extend to biodiversity, climate stability, and societal sustainability.<sup>9</sup> Addressing these denials is crucial for a balanced relationship with our planet and its inhabitants.

The book *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze* emerges as a timely and scholarly exploration of denialism, aiming to unravel its intricate layers and offering a critical lens through which to examine both individual and collective responses to pressing animal welfare and environmental issues. Its interdisciplinary structure is meticulously designed to guide the reader through a textured understanding of denialism. Each of the book's 11 chapters addresses a different facet of denial, whether it be its psychological underpinnings, cultural manifestations, or philosophical implications. The editors have selected contributions that address societal and individual denial aspects, critique anthropocentrism, and consider frameworks impacting the animals and the environment. The methodology employed encompasses both qualitative and quantitative analyses, combining empirical data with theoretical foundations. This structure allows the reader to appreciate the complexity and interconnectivity of the themes presented and facilitates a nuanced discussion that is both grounded in evidence and rich in philosophical insight. Overall, this carefully curated book provides valuable insights for a broad audience, fostering a more ethical and sustainable interaction with non-human animals and the environment.

This review aims to provide a critical perspective on the book, thereby contributing to the discourse on denialism as it pertains to the fields of animal and environmental ethics.

## II. Understanding denial: Psychological and societal perspectives

*Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze* opens with a profound exploration of the psychological and cultural underpinnings of denialism. Chapters 1 and 2, penned by Susanne Stoll-Kleemann<sup>10</sup> and Arne Johan Vetlesen,<sup>11</sup> respectively, provide a foundational

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*ethics* 28, no. 4 (2022): 299-314.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah R. Weiskopf et al., "Climate Change Effects on Biodiversity, Ecosystems, Ecosystem Services, and Natural Resource Management in the United States," *Science of The Total Environment* 733 (2020): 137782.

<sup>10</sup> Susanne Stoll-Kleemann, "From Denial to Moral Disengagement: How Integrating Fundamental Insights from Psychology Can Help Us Better Understand Ongoing Inaction in the Light of an Exacerbating Climate Crisis," in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 17-34 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Arne Johan Vetlesen, "Denial as a Sense of Entitlement: Assessing the Role of Culture," in

understanding of how denial operates within individual and collective mindsets.

In chapter 1, Stoll-Kleemann delves into the psychological mechanisms that fuel climate change denial.<sup>12</sup> The denial of appropriate climate action, particularly in the form of low-carbon behavior, is identified as a prevalent issue.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on theories like Bandura's selective moral disengagement,<sup>14</sup> Festinger's cognitive dissonance,<sup>15</sup> and Kohlberg's moral development,<sup>16</sup> the author illustrates how denial is not merely a passive state of ignorance, but an active, psychologically comforting stance that individuals adopt to alleviate cognitive dissonance and moral discomfort. The analysis reveals how personal and societal factors such as egoism, self-interest, and political influences perpetuate this denial.<sup>17</sup> In this chapter, denial is portrayed as "convenient, comforting, and occasionally useful; but it also cripples our ability to face urgent public policy issues effectively."<sup>18</sup> The author explores different forms of climate denial, such as climate silence, defined as a

"conspiracy of silence" based on people tacitly agreeing to "outwardly ignore something of which they are all personally aware" and the factors that hinder action on mitigation and adaptation in the case of the climate crisis,<sup>19</sup>

and moral corruption,<sup>20</sup> and argues that these are forms of "emotionally self-protective self-deception."<sup>21</sup> A call to comprehend the causes and

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*Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 35-54 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Stoll-Kleemann, 17-34.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> Albert Bandura, "Impeding Ecological Sustainability Through Selective Moral Disengagement," *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development* 2, no. 1 (2007): 8-35. Cited in Stoll-Kleemann, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), 4. Cited in Stoll-Kleemann, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. II: The Psychology of Moral Development* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984), 540. Cited in Stoll-Kleemann, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Stoll-Kleemann, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Adrian Bardon, *The Truth About Denial: Bias and Self-Deception in Science, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3. Quoted in Stoll-Kleemann, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29. Cited in Stoll-Kleemann, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Stoll-Kleemann, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Bardon, 2. Quoted in Stoll-Kleemann, 17-18.

mechanisms of denial in the private sphere is made, emphasizing the need for individuals to make better decisions for themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Chapter 2, authored by Vetlesen, shifts the focus to the cultural dimensions of denial.<sup>23</sup> Vetlesen examines the interplay between individual psychology and societal norms, which facilitate a kind of collective myopia towards the degradation of the natural world and the exploitation of animals. Through the lens of the Norwegian society, Vetlesen presents a compelling case study of how consumerism is inculcated from an early age, fostering a sense of entitlement to natural resources.<sup>24</sup> The author argues that this entitlement, infused with narcissism at the individual level and collectivism at the cultural level,<sup>25</sup> is a product of the industrial era, now exacerbated by capitalist consumerism.<sup>26</sup> Early socialization into consumerism is not merely a passive act but a dynamic process implicating individuals in environmental harm, leading to denial as a coping mechanism for the resulting guilt.<sup>27</sup> Denial, according to Vetlesen, is not just an avoidance of reality but a complex psychological defense intertwined with a culture that dampens effective communication and action against climate change.<sup>28</sup> The concept of “industrial ambivalence”<sup>29</sup> is introduced, which, Vetlesen argues, is emblematic of a deeper psychological conflict that manifests in an oscillation between environmental concern and a resignation to the status quo<sup>30</sup> – a sentiment that has been encapsulated in the work of Renee Lertzman, whose interviews with residents of Green Bay, Wisconsin, unearth a nuanced tension between local industrial activity and environmental degradation. In these interviews, the residents expressed

both disgust and shock towards the level of local water and air pollution, yet on the other hand they quickly shifted modes and contradicted themselves to provide excuses or rationales for the very issues they just reported unhappiness over,<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Stoll-Kleemann, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Vetlesen, 35-54.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Renee Lertzman, *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement* (East Sussex and New York: Routledge, 2015), 107. Quoted in Vetlesen, 40.

essentially recognizing the indispensable economic benefits and employment opportunities the industries provide. However, to counter denial, one must confront the ethical implications of personal choices, challenging the “out of sight, out of mind” mentality.<sup>32</sup>

These two first chapters of the book collectively dissect the multifaceted nature of denial, essentially laying the groundwork for understanding the broader book. Stoll-Kleeman’s focus on individual psychological barriers complements Vetlesen’s analysis of cultural and societal influences. Denial, whether psychological or cultural, is not merely a lack of awareness nor an information deficit, but a deeply ingrained, deliberate, and complex mechanism that serves to protect individual comfort and the societal status quo. This understanding is vital for anyone seeking to engage with and transform the prevailing narratives around animal suffering and environmental degradation. The message is clear: to create sustainable and ethical change, we must first confront and understand the roots of denial in ourselves and our societies.

### III. Ethical reflections on animal subjectivity and human bias

Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 10 authored by Tomaž Grušovnik,<sup>33</sup> Adam See,<sup>34</sup> Craig Taylor,<sup>35</sup> and the team of Reingard Spannring and De Giorgio-Schoorl,<sup>36</sup> respectively, delve into the philosophical, psychological, and sociological nuances of how humans perceive and interact with animals, revealing a deep-seated denial of animal subjectivity and agency.

Chapter 3 written by Tomaž Grušovnik, opens with a philosophical inquiry into the moral agency of animals.<sup>37</sup> Grušovnik’s argument

<sup>32</sup> Vetlesen, 48-49.

<sup>33</sup> Tomaž Grušovnik, “Skepticism and Animal Virtues: Denialism of Animal Morality,” in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 55-70 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> Adam See, “Human Uniqueness, Animal Minds, and Anthropodenial,” in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 71-88 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> Craig Taylor, “Suffering Animals: Creaturely Fellowship and Its Denial,” in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 89-102 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> Reingard Spannring and Jose De Giorgio-Schoorl, “The Horse in the Room: The Denial of Animal Subjectivity and Agency in Social Science Research on Human – Horse Relationships,” in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 187-200 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Grušovnik, 55.

navigates through the intellectual territory that traditionally denies animals the status of moral agents, relegating them to mere moral patients.<sup>38</sup> This discrepancy in moral recognition is not due to a lack of evidence or understanding but rather reflects a cultural and psychological reluctance to confront the ethical implications of animal suffering.<sup>39</sup> The author compellingly argues that societal structures, such as the mechanization and concealment of animal slaughter, not only hide the reality of animal suffering but also psychologically impact slaughterhouse workers, indicating an implicit awareness and avoidance of ethical responsibility.<sup>40</sup> Grušovnik's discussion extends to the concept of "uncanny proximity,"<sup>41</sup> a term encapsulating the human tendency to intellectually and morally distance themselves from animals. The author suggests that this distancing is a defense mechanism against the unsettling reminder of our own mortality, as mirrored in animal lives.<sup>42</sup> Conclusively, the chapter calls for a reevaluation of our ethical frameworks, acknowledging animal agency and moral complexity, urging a shift in perception towards a more inclusive understanding of morality.

In chapter 4, Adam See takes a different yet complementary approach. See's focus is on anthropodenial and anthropomorphic bias, particularly in the context of animal cognition. The author scrutinizes four principal strategies that deny or misrepresent animal cognition (denial by disparate contexts, cognitive simplicity, redefinition, and human ability),<sup>43</sup> highlighting the anthropocentric bias in these arguments. A significant challenge in animal cognition studies is highlighted: the so called "logical problem,"<sup>44</sup> underlining the difficulty in determining if behaviors result from mental state attribution (like predicting others' intentions or beliefs) or associative responses. The chapter emphasizes the importance of associative learning in complex human behaviors and criticizes the prevalent false dichotomy in cognitive studies that dismisses animals' unique skills when they do not mirror human capabilities.<sup>45</sup> It also challenges the exaggeration of typical human perfor-

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 61-64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>43</sup> See, 71-72.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 72-74.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 77-79.



mance (anthropofabulation)<sup>46</sup> and the narrow definition of psychological terms at a human level (semantic anthropocentrism),<sup>47</sup> which lead to misunderstandings of animal capacities. Finally, the chapter stresses the importance of considering a wide array of evidence and developing a “consilience of inductions” to best explain the data in animal cognition research, rather than solely relying on crucial experiments.<sup>48</sup>

Chapter 5 by Craig Taylor, adopts a more ethical and philosophical stance. Taylor scrutinizes the moral individualism that often underpins human-animal relationships. The author refers to the limitations of animal advocacy, highlighting that animals, unlike human oppressed groups, cannot self-advocate, making humans their perpetual trustees.<sup>49</sup> It is argued that if certain characteristics warrant ethical treatment in humans, they should logically extend to animals with similar traits.<sup>50</sup> Taylor’s critical analysis focuses on the societal tendency to evade confronting the harsh treatment of animals, suggesting a form of denial rooted in the avoidance of acknowledging shared vulnerabilities with animals.<sup>51</sup> Denial in this context is portrayed as enabling humans to ignore or minimize animal suffering.

Chapter 10 confronts the pervasive denial of equine subjectivity and agency in social science research, by drawing a parallel to the “elephant in the room” metaphor.<sup>52</sup> Authors Spannring and De Giorgio-Schoorl critique the anthropocentric perspective that dominates this field, often exhibiting “disciplinary blinkers,”<sup>53</sup> where horses are often relegated to the status of mere objects or tools in human-centric narratives.<sup>54</sup> The authors argue that this oversight is not just a matter of academic bias, but reflects deeper speciesist views embedded within societal norms and practices.<sup>55</sup> They emphasize that acknowledging the subjectivity and agency of horses is not only crucial for ethical research but also has profound implications for our moral responsibilities towards non-human animals. The chapter serves as a compelling appeal

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, 90.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 95-99.

<sup>52</sup> Spannring and De Giorgio-Schoorl, 187-200.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 189-190.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 187.

for rethinking our ethical and practical approaches towards non-human animals, emphasizing the need to see horses not just as passive entities in human narratives, but as sentient beings with complex socio-cognitive skills, experiences, and rights.

Collectively, these four chapters unravel the complexities of human-animal relationships. Each chapter brings a unique perspective, yet they harmoniously converge on the core issue of denial in the human perception and treatment of animals. The common thread is the profound denial of animal subjectivity and moral agency. This denial is not a mere oversight but a deeply ingrained cultural and psychological mechanism that allows humans to maintain existing norms and beliefs about human superiority and animal subordination. For example, research has shown that people tend to deny mental capacities to animals they consume, and this denial helps in reducing the cognitive dissonance that arises from eating meat while caring about animal welfare.<sup>56</sup> This denial of mental capacities to animals used for human consumption is a significant psychological process that enables meat-eating behavior and protects cultural norms associated with meat consumption. Overall, the themes explored in these four chapters serve not only as a scholarly critique but also highlight the book's commitment to challenging anthropocentrism and urge a reevaluation of our ethical frameworks and a shift in perception towards a more inclusive understanding of morality that encompasses non-human animals.

#### IV. Case studies in denial: From fisheries to meat marketing

Chapters 6 and 7, authored by Martin Lee Mueller and Katja Maria Hydle, and Karen Lykke Syse and Kristian Bjørkdahl, respectively, present compelling case studies exemplifying denial in industries ranging from fisheries<sup>57</sup> to meat marketing.<sup>58</sup> These chapters collectively offer a poignant critique of the systemic denial prevalent in our interactions with non-human animals, particularly in the contexts of food production and consumption.

<sup>56</sup> Brock Bastian, Steve Loughnan, Nick Haslam, and Helena R. M. Radke, "Don't Mind Meat? The Denial of Mind to Animals Used for Human Consumption," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38, no. 2 (2012): 247-256.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Lee Mueller and Katja Maria Hydle, "Brave New Salmon: From Enlightened Denial to Enlivened Practices," in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 103-126 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> Karen Lykke Syse and Kristian Bjørkdahl, "The Animal That Therefore Was Removed from View: The Presentation of Meat in Norway, 1950–2015," in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 127-144 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

Perhaps one of the most compelling and eye-opening chapters of the book, chapter 6 explores the Norwegian salmon feedlot industry, providing a critical view of the commodification of salmon.<sup>59</sup> Mueller and Hydle's analysis is anchored in extensive empirical research conducted from 2010 to 2017, encompassing observations at industrial sites, interviews, and comprehensive studies of salmon farming practices. Their findings reveal a systemic denial of salmon's inherent aliveness and subjectivity within these practices. The authors scrutinize how instrumental rationality, a hallmark of Enlightenment thought emphasizing calculability and utility, has led to the assimilation of salmon into industrial frameworks, resulting in their commodification.<sup>60</sup> This rationality leads to practices that control external conditions such as weather and temperature,<sup>61</sup> and extend to manipulating salmon's genetic makeup and breeding.<sup>62</sup> The salmon, stripped of individuality and subjectivity, are reduced to mere units of production, embodying a profound "conceptual and perceptual rift between the rich inner worlds of humans and the rich inner worlds of all other living forms"<sup>63</sup> – a rift solidified by Enlightenment ideologies.<sup>64</sup> The authors argue that this paradigm, focused on control, efficiency, and utility, overlooks the intrinsic value of living beings, treating them as biomass to be manipulated for maximum yield and profit.<sup>65</sup> The ecological implications of this mindset are highlighted, pointing out the disregard for the limits of growth on a finite planet and the resultant exploitative relationship with nature.<sup>66</sup> In a call for a paradigmatic shift, the authors advocate for "Enlivenment," a concept that seeks to acknowledge and respect the interconnectedness of humans with the biotic community.<sup>67</sup>

Chapter 7 by Syse and Bjørkdahl delves into the transformation of meat presentation in Norway over several decades.<sup>68</sup> The authors examine how meat, once clearly identifiable as part of an animal, has gradually been transformed in its presentation to consumers, contributing to

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<sup>59</sup> Mueller and Hydle, 103-126.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-123.

<sup>68</sup> Syse and Bjørkdahl, 127-144.

a form of denial about its animal origins and a disconnection between consumers and the reality of meat production.<sup>69</sup> This disconnection contributes to a broader societal denial about the nature of meat consumption, where the reality of animal suffering and death is obscured.<sup>70</sup> This denial is portrayed not merely as an individual psychological response but as a culturally reinforced phenomenon, further complicated by the “meat paradox” – the societal difficulty in reconciling respect for certain animals with the consumption of others.<sup>71</sup> The authors discuss the rationalization of meat consumption through the “Four Ns” (natural, normal, necessary, and nice)<sup>72</sup> highlighting cultural alienation from the realities of meat consumption and the transformation in meat presentation.

In these chapters, denial manifests in multifaceted ways. Chapter 6 portrays denial as a philosophical and cultural phenomenon, where the reductionist view of animals as mere resources is deeply ingrained in societal and industrial practices.<sup>73</sup> Chapter 7, on the other hand, presents denial as a more subtle, yet pervasive, socio-cultural phenomenon, where the disconnection between meat consumption and animal suffering is reinforced through marketing and presentation strategies.<sup>74</sup> The critical analysis provided in these chapters draws attention to the ethical, environmental, and psychological dimensions of denial in our treatment of non-human animals. The authors highlight the need for a paradigm shift in how we perceive and interact with animals, advocating for a more humane, ecologically sustainable, and ethically responsible approach. Addressing the denial in industries related to animal products requires confronting not only individual choices but also the broader societal, cultural, and economic systems that perpetuate such denial.

## V. Economic clout and political persuasion in animal agriculture

Chapter 8, authored by John Sorenson and Atsuko Matsuoka, examines the denialism in animal agriculture, focusing on how economic and political interests influence societal attitudes towards animal exploitation.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>73</sup> Mueller and Hydle, 103-126.

<sup>74</sup> Syse and Bjørkdahl, 127-144.

<sup>75</sup> John Sorenson and Atsuko Matsuoka, “Political Economy of Denialism: Addressing the Case of Animal Agriculture,” in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik,

The chapter presents a nuanced critique of the animal industrial complex's strategies to sustain its dominance amidst escalating ethical and environmental scrutiny. The strategic image crafting employed by the industry, depicting farmers and ranchers as everyday, trustworthy figures<sup>76</sup> is meticulously dissected. The authors adeptly explore the theme of interpretive denial,<sup>77</sup> especially in response to veganism and animal rights activism.<sup>78</sup> They argue that the industry, through its considerable lobbying efforts and political contributions, not only seeks to promote meat consumption but also to discredit veganism, often framing it as a "malicious fringe movement."<sup>79</sup> This narrative construction serves a dual purpose: it counters the portrayal of animal rights activists as extremists and promotes meat consumption as a normative, benevolent practice.<sup>80</sup> This representation is critical in the industry's broader strategy to deflect criticism and maintain consumer demand. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the role of commodity checkoff programs in North America, which accumulate funds from all producers to promote animal products.<sup>81</sup> These programs have been pivotal in embedding products like milk, pork, and beef into the collective consumer consciousness, utilizing large-scale marketing campaigns.

Denial, as portrayed in this chapter, has been encapsulated by Jason Hannan under the term "meatsplaining" (a play on "mansplaining") functioning as "an umbrella concept for the multiple forms of denialism perpetuated by the animal agriculture industry."<sup>82</sup> The critical examination presented in the chapter culminates in a compelling insight: the meat industry's utilization of economic power, political influence, and strategic communication is not merely a reactionary stance but a well-orchestrated, strategic effort to counteract challenges to its practices and preserve its market position and public image. This insight is vital for understanding the dynamic nature of industry responses to ethical and environmental concerns, revealing

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Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 145-168 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>76</sup> Sorenson and Matsuoka, 149.

<sup>77</sup> "In interpretive denial, the facts themselves are not denied but are instead given a different interpretation, taken to mean something else," in Vetlesen, 37.

<sup>78</sup> Sorenson and Matsuoka, 150-156.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Jason Hannan, "Meatsplaining: A Name for Animal Ag Rhetoric," *Faunalytics*, May 19, 2021, <https://faunalytics.org/meatsplaining-a-name-for-animal-ag-rhetoric/>.

a broader commentary on how industries can manipulate information and perception to maintain their status quo in the face of growing scrutiny.

## VI. Technological dreams vs. environmental realities

Authored by Helen Kopnina, Joe Gray, Haydn Washington, and John Piccolo, chapter 9 critically examines the concept of “Techno-Eco-Optimism.”<sup>83</sup> The premise of this concept is that despite evidence of human-caused biodiversity loss and environmental decline, there is reliance on the “belief that we will find technological solutions” to these problems.<sup>84</sup>

The authors argue that this societal optimistic bias, often leaning towards innovation over recognizing and addressing environmental threats, is misplaced and counterproductive. This perspective, positing technology as the panacea for environmental crises, is argued to be a form of denial, overlooking the grave ethical ramifications of biodiversity loss and ecological destruction. The authors advocate for an eco-realistic approach, urging acknowledgment and confrontation of the complex challenges in environmental conservation.<sup>85</sup> They promote “ecojustice”<sup>86</sup> and “eco-democracy,”<sup>87</sup> emphasizing the need for

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<sup>83</sup> Helen Kopnina, Joe Gray, Haydn Washington, and John Piccolo, “Celebrate the Anthropocene? Why ‘Techno-Eco-Optimism’ Is a Strategy of Ultimate Denial,” in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 169-186 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>84</sup> Kopnina et al., 170.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 175-176.

<sup>86</sup> Ecojustice is a concept that extends beyond the traditional focus on human-centered justice to include justice for nature itself. It is grounded in ecological ethics and ecocentrism, which recognize the intrinsic value and rights of all elements of the natural world, not just humans. Ecojustice challenges the prevalent anthropocentric bias that prioritizes human needs and interests in environmental issues. It incorporates the idea of distributive justice applied to nature, advocating for an ethic of bio-proportionality where all species and ecosystems have their rightful place and consideration. This concept refutes the notion that prioritizing nature’s rights is anti-human, instead proposing that a balance can be achieved between social justice and ecojustice. For example, see Haydn Washington et al., “Foregrounding Ecojustice in Conservation,” *Biological Conservation* 228 (2018): 367-374. When explored to its utmost extent, this conceptual framework can engender radical ideologies; see Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, “Environmental Ethics and Linkola’s Ecofascism: An Ethics beyond Humanism,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 9, no. 4 (2014): 586-601.

<sup>87</sup> Eco-democracy “refers to political processes that recognize the intrinsic value of non-human beings through ‘inclusive pluralism,’” implying a shift from traditional anthropocentrism (the privileging of human beings over non-human entities) towards a more inclusive approach that values all beings within the ecosystem. For more information see Helen Kopnina et al., “Eco-democracy in Practice: Exploration of Debates on Limits and Possibilities of Addressing Envi-

a balanced approach that integrates ethical considerations into environmental efforts.<sup>88</sup> The “Nature Needs Half” movement<sup>89</sup> is presented as an example of eco-realism, advocating for significant ecological conservation.<sup>90</sup>

The form of denial presented in chapter 9, is portrayed as particularly dangerous as it provides a false sense of security and diverts attention from the need for fundamental societal change. A compelling argument is made for eco-realism over techno-eco-optimism and the necessity to move beyond mere technological fixes to acknowledge the complex ethical and ecological dimensions involved in sustainability efforts. Looking at the broader literature, however, there are examples of how technology, when thoughtfully applied and integrated with existing conservation frameworks, can effectively aid in conservation efforts.<sup>91</sup> This perspective complements the discussion in this chapter, by providing a pragmatic view of how technology can be part of the solution to environmental challenges, especially when it is co-produced with conservation decision-makers and practitioners.

## VII. Denial in the courtroom: The neglect of non-human rights

In chapter 11, Opi Outhwaite presents a profound critique of the legal system’s approach to non-human animal rights.<sup>92</sup>

The author, utilizing the example of habeas corpus cases for chimpanzees, illustrates the entrenched anthropocentric biases within ju-

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ronmental Challenges Within Democratic Systems,” *Visions for Sustainability* 15 (2021): 9-23.

<sup>88</sup> Kopnina et al., 174.

<sup>89</sup> The “Nature Needs Half” movement, is a conservation initiative advocating for the protection of at least half of the Earth’s land and seas. This ambitious goal is aimed at ensuring the long-term health of the biosphere and sustaining the diversity of life. The movement is based on scientific evidence which suggests that current global conservation targets are insufficient. By setting a higher target, the “Nature Needs Half” movement seeks to address the growing biodiversity crisis and ensure the maintenance of ecological processes and services critical for life on Earth. For example, see Harvey Locke, “Nature Needs Half: A Necessary and Hopeful New Agenda for Protected Areas,” *PARKS* 19, no. 2 (2013): 13-22.

<sup>90</sup> Kopnina et al., 175-176.

<sup>91</sup> For example, the Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system to improve the implementation of the U.S. Endangered Species Act, HabitatPatrol for automated habitat change detection, and the Range and Mapping Protocol for collaborative species range mapping. For more information see Jacob W. Malcom et al., “Coproduce Conservation Technology with Conservation Decision Makers and Practitioners to Increase Its Impact,” *Frontiers in Conservation Science* 2 (2021): Article 815854.

<sup>92</sup> Opi Outhwaite, “Still in the Shadow of Man? Judicial Denialism and Nonhuman Animals,” in *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Reingard Spannring, and Karen Lykke Syse, 201-220 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

dicial reasoning.<sup>93</sup> The legal system, through interpretive denial<sup>94</sup> and adherence to human exceptionalism,<sup>95</sup> consistently fails to recognize the rights and personhood of sentient animals, drawing a stark contrast to the legal protections afforded to, e.g., comatose individuals who lack sentience.<sup>96</sup> The chapter delves deeper into the mechanisms of this denial, highlighting the reluctance of the legal system to challenge existing societal norms regarding animals and criticizing it for its reliance on narrow legal interpretations and constructs that prevent the recognition of animals as legal persons. This approach, the author argues, significantly contributes to the ongoing abuse and suffering of animals.<sup>97</sup> It underlines the paradox in the legal system which, while acknowledging persuasive precedents that could extend rights to animals, continues to uphold a speciesist status quo that treats animals as mere objects.

In essence, chapter 11 calls for a fundamental reevaluation of the legal system's stance on non-human animals. It advocates for a shift in legal frameworks to overcome interpretive denial and to align with contemporary understandings of animal sentience and welfare. The author suggests that granting legal personhood and rights to animals is not just an ethical imperative but also a crucial step towards fostering sustainable societies and economies in the Anthropocene.<sup>98</sup> This reevaluation is essential for acknowledging the moral status and importance of non-human animals in our shared world.

## VIII. Discussion

*Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze* weaves a tapestry of interconnected themes, dissecting the complex nature of denialism in animal and environmental ethics. It delves deeply into psychological mechanisms, such as cognitive dissonance and moral disengagement, enriched by cultural analyses that unveil the societal norms underpinning animal commodification and environmental degradation. Challenging traditional environmental discourse, the work advocates for a reevaluation of moral agency, recognizing non-human sentience and critiquing anthropocentric views. It also adeptly navigates the in-

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<sup>93</sup> Outhwaite, 204-206, 208, 209, 211-213.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 207-208.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 201.



tricate interplay of economic and political forces in sustaining denialism, revealing their role in maintaining the status quo. Finally, the book places denialism within both historical and contemporary contexts, showing how it has evolved and how it manifests in current environmental and animal welfare challenges. Such contextual understanding is vital for comprehending the depth and persistence of denial in these areas. This holistic approach highlights the need for a multifaceted strategy to foster ethical and sustainable coexistence with nature and its non-human inhabitants.

The book diverges from conventional texts in environmental philosophy and animal ethics by focusing on aspects that contribute to the overlook or denial of ethical considerations in practice. The work stands in contrast to foundational texts such as Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*<sup>99</sup> and Arne Naess's fundamental principles of deep ecology,<sup>100</sup> which establish standards of ecological conscience and respect for nature, by delving into the human tendencies that lead to ignoring these ethical principles, thereby addressing the gap between theory and practice. Similarly, in the field of animal ethics, while seminal works by Peter Singer<sup>101</sup> and Tom Regan<sup>102</sup> lay down utilitarian and deontological frameworks, respectively, this book probes into societal mechanisms perpetuating speciesism, highlighting barriers to realizing these ethical frameworks. Thus, the book fills a significant niche in the literature by addressing why established ethical principles often fail in real-world application, offering an interdisciplinary perspective that aligns with contemporary discussions

<sup>99</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

<sup>100</sup> Deep ecology is a theoretical framework or philosophy that advocates for an intrinsic value in all living beings and the natural environment, as opposed to an anthropocentric viewpoint. This philosophy emphasizes principles like biodiversity, ecological balance, and the interconnectedness of all natural entities. Naess's work is foundational in the field of environmental ethics and philosophy. Arne Naess, "The Shallow and Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary," in *The Selected Works of Arne Naess. Vol. 10, Deep Ecology of Wisdom: Explorations in Unities of Nature and Cultures: Selected Papers*, eds. Harold Glasser and Alan R. Drengson 2263–2269 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 7–12. See also, Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, "Supernatural Will and Organic Unity in Process: From Spinoza's Naturalistic Pantheism to Arne Naess' New Age Ecosophy T and Environmental Ethics," in *Studies on Supernaturalism*, ed. G. Arabatzis, 173–193 (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1975); also, Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal," in *Animal Ethics: Past and Present Perspectives*, ed. Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, 163–178 (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2012).

<sup>102</sup> Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983). Also, Tom Regan, "Empty Cages: Animal Rights and Vivisection," in *Animal Ethics: Past and Present Perspectives*, ed. Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, 179–195 (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2012).

recognizing the complexity of human attitudes towards animals and nature.

The book excels in laying a comprehensive theoretical foundation; however, an extension into more concrete, actionable strategies could further enhance its utility, providing readers with a more direct roadmap for addressing and overcoming denial in the context of animal welfare and environmental degradation issues.

For instance, the insights from this book can inform the development of more effective environmental education programs that go beyond mere information dissemination to address emotional and cognitive resistance. Research has shown that communication strategies focusing on engaging and educational content, such as well-researched books and documentaries, significantly impact the consumption of animal products.<sup>103</sup> Such methods likely foster a deeper emotional connection and cognitive understanding of the issues, which can be more persuasive and less likely to trigger defensive reactions compared to more confrontational or graphic methods. This aligns with the understanding that addressing emotional and cognitive resistance requires nuanced, empathetic, and well-rounded approaches to communication and education. Further, in addressing denialism, the principles of behavior change, as discussed by Stone and Fernandez,<sup>104</sup> can be effectively employed. This approach necessitates first fostering an awareness of the dissonance between an individual's professed values and their denialist stance,<sup>105</sup> such as the discrepancy observed when an individual claims to value animal rights yet denies the impact of factory farming on animal welfare. Implementing behavior change involves strategies like encouraging public commitment to consistent ethical stances, facilitating self-reflection to recognize contradictions, and providing education and support for gradual belief modification.<sup>106</sup> For instance, in an academic setting, students might be engaged in activities where they publicly endorse animal welfare, followed by guided discussions that illuminate their own contradictory behaviors, such as consuming products from sources that compromise animal welfare. While this process promotes cognitive dissonance, it harnesses it as a catalyst

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<sup>103</sup> *Faunalytics*, "Planting Seeds: The Impact of Diet & Different Animal Advocacy Tactics," April 27, 2022, <https://faunalytics.org/relative-effectiveness/>.

<sup>104</sup> Jeff Stone and Nicholas C. Fernandez, "To Practice What We Preach: The Use of Hypocrisy and Cognitive Dissonance to Motivate Behavior Change," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 2 (2008): 1024-1051.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

for reassessing beliefs and adopting behaviors more aligned with the expressed ethical positions. The efficacy of this approach lies in its ability to subtly yet powerfully realign beliefs through self-realization and guided cognitive restructuring, thereby addressing denialism in a non-confrontational and introspective manner. Of course, the interdisciplinary nature of the book also suggests a need for collaborative efforts across different sectors – governmental, non-governmental, educational, and private – for practical efforts addressing the deep-rooted issues of denial to be successful.

While the book offers comprehensive and novel insights into denialism as it permeates attitudes towards animals and the environment, it is worth noting that it predominantly reflects a Western-centric perspective. Chapters that delve into specific industries, like fisheries<sup>107</sup> and meat marketing,<sup>108</sup> discuss these issues within the context of Western societies. Further, discussions on the Western culture of entitlement,<sup>109</sup> legal frameworks regarding animal captivity,<sup>110</sup> and speciesist culture in animal behavior science<sup>111</sup> highlight the Western-centric legal and ethical mindset and the influence of Western instrumental rationality. However, the book's focus primarily on Western perspectives may not adequately address the diverse global and cultural perspectives on animal and environmental ethics. For example, in non-Western contexts, denialism in animal welfare is exemplified by practices in traditional Chinese medicine, such as the use of rhinoceros horns and shark fins, driven by entrenched cultural beliefs. Despite scientific evidence negating their medicinal value and acknowledging the detrimental impact on wildlife,<sup>112</sup> these practices persist, reflecting a form of denialism deeply rooted in the historical and cultural norms of certain Asian societies. This highlights the complexity of addressing animal welfare issues globally, necessitating culturally sensitive and ethically informed approaches; ultimately, these will enhance the effectiveness of policies and initiatives.

Despite its Western-centric perspective, however, *Environmental and Animal Abuse Denial: Averting Our Gaze* stands as an invaluable resource in the study of denialism. It transcends being just a scholar-

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<sup>107</sup> Mueller and Hyde, 103-126.

<sup>108</sup> Syse and Bjørkdahl, 127-144.

<sup>109</sup> Vetlesen, 35-54.

<sup>110</sup> Outhwaite, 201-220.

<sup>111</sup> Spannring and De Giorgio-Schoorl, 190.

<sup>112</sup> Bob Ladendorf and Brett Ladendorf-Schoorl, "Wildlife Apocalypse: How Myths and Superstitions Are Driving Animal Extinctions," in *Unreason: Best of Skeptical Inquirer*, eds. Kendrick Frazier and Benjamin Radford, 136-149 (Essex, CT: Prometheus Books, 2024), 137.

ly work, serving instead as a reflective lens on society, uncovering a façade deeply scarred by denial. As Thoreau retreated to Walden to ponder the essence of living deliberately,<sup>113</sup> so too does this collection beckon us to retreat into contemplation of our entanglements with nature and our fellow beings. In doing so, there remains hope that we may finally embrace the urgent necessity of change, not as an insurmountable challenge, but as an opportunity for collective growth and a healthier coexistence with the natural world.

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<sup>113</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

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