



Who is responsible for reinforcing the different treatment between different species?



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How to cite this article: Uygun, Gizem. 2021. "Who is Responsible for Reinforcing the Different Treatments between Different Species?". *Animal Ethics Review* 1, no. 1 (September): 10-18.

PHOTO: Cotton. Video and graphics.

Abstract

Eti, one of the leading snack companies in Turkey, launched in 2019 a new corporate social responsibility campaign for one of their biscuits. The company committed to donating to three Turkish NGOs working for the welfare of stray cats and dogs. The ingredients of the biscuit include cow's milk and bovine gelatin. Therefore, while the campaign supports the welfare of some species, it reinforces the suffering of some others. The production of this campaign in combination with the lack of response from the general public or the animal rights organizations showcase the widespread normalization in the different treatment of the different species of nonhuman animals among the actors of society. Melanie Joy (2010) suggests that the contradiction of loving some species of nonhuman animals while normalizing the suffering of some others is possible through the learned psychic schemas which are the constructs of deeply structured belief systems. David Nibert (2013) proposes that transcending capitalism is a prerequisite for ending animal domestication. Nibert provides three reasons for his proposition: the use of mass media by the elites to shape public opinion, the capitalists' power over government and capitalism rendering the individuals incapable of questioning through constant insecurity, poverty and deprivation. The paper argues that capitalism as the dominant system creates the psychic schemas that are reinforced by Eti's campaign. Lastly, the paper suggests using Arendt's (1964) lesson of "The Banality of Evil" to assign the responsibility on every member of the society for the suffering caused by humans on nonhuman animals.



Keywords:

Animal domestication, banality of evil, critical animal and media studies, Eti, psychic numbing, psychic schemas, Turkey.

1. Introduction

Eti, a snack company from Turkey, announced in 2019 a new corporate social responsibility campaign for one of their biscuits. The company committed to donating to three Turkish NGOs working on the welfare of stray cats and dogs as well as promoting these NGOs in their ad campaigns. The biscuits' ingredients, including cow's milk and bovine gelatin, makes the campaign a perfect showcase of the contradiction of loving and protecting some nonhuman animals while normalizing the suffering of others. In addition to the company's contradiction, the lack of critique on the campaign by the individuals in society and the appreciation of the campaign by the largest animal rights NGOs in Turkey show that the contradiction is not specific to an actor in the society, on the contrary, it is widespread.

Melanie Joy suggests that the contradiction of loving some members of some species, while normalizing the suffering caused on some others, is due to

the learned psychic schemas. These psychic schemas, which are the constructs of deeply structured belief systems, cause moral discomfort in individuals due to the incongruence of their values (caring for nonhuman animals) and actions (causing the suffering of some nonhuman animals) (Joy 2010). Humans deal with this discomfort through psychic numbing, which is a psychological process that makes it possible for humans to disconnect from their experiences emotionally and mentally (Joy 2010).

The paper draws attention to the difficulty of assigning the responsibility on the reinforcement of contradictions around the different treatments for different species to one group in the society. In the case of Eti, the paper detects three separate actors of society contributing to this reinforcement: the company, including all the individuals that worked on the creation of this campaign; the individuals in the society, including but not limited to the consumers of the product; and the animal rights NGOs in Turkey. The paper argues that the spread of the contradiction among different actors in society, which according to Joy is caused by the psychic numbing, causes a normalization of not thinking about the suffering caused by humans on nonhuman animals. The article later uses the "banality of evil", a term introduced by Hannah Arendt in 1964, which suggests that simply by not thinking and behaving by the rules of the system, ordinary people can cause a great deal of suffering (Arendt 1964). Although the term has been used in understanding the suffering caused by humans on humans, little work has used the "banality of evil" in the sphere of the suffering caused by humans on nonhuman animals. The paper suggests to use the "banality of evil" in combination with Melanie Joy's psychic numbing and assigning the responsibility of the exploitation of nonhuman animals on everyone who fails to think before acting and engaging in behavior that is linked with the exploitation of nonhuman animals.

2. The case: Eti's campaign and the widespread contradictions

Eti, founded in 1961, is one of the deep-seated snack companies in Turkey (Eti 2020). In December 2019, Eti launched a new corporate social responsibility campaign for one of its famous biscuits, Benimo. The campaign was introduced through their video advertisement, which was broadcast on TV as well as on the company's YouTube channel. Solely on YouTube, the advertisement reached 8.5 Million views in 3 months (Eti 2019). Through the campaign, Eti announced its commitment to be a donor for three leading NGOs working for the welfare of the stray cats and dogs in Turkey (HAYTAP, Encander and HEPAD) and called its audience to be donors of these NGOs too. Additionally, the campaign called for its audience to share their thoughts and feelings about the campaign, and the love they have for stray cats and dogs through the hashtag #benimdostumo, which translates as "he/she is my friend".

Although Eti helps the stray cats and dogs in Turkey through this campaign, the ingredients of the biscuit, including cow's milk and bovine gelatin creates a contradiction on the company's stance on animal rights (Icerir.com 2017). Through the advertising campaign the company allows the biscuit consumers to feel good about themselves for buying the product, making them

believe that they are helping other animals while rendering the suffering of nonhuman animals who have been exploited in the production of the same product invisible. A company creating such a contradiction is neither a first nor is it surprising. Since Herman and Chomsky's theory of manufacturing consent from 1988, many scholars have extensively studied the public consent being manufactured via entirely legal means through the media and communications by the elites (Almiron 2016, 27).

However, Eti's case becomes interesting to study due to two additional contradictions. The first one is the presence of an assigned hashtag to the campaign (#benimdostumo). On the one hand, the presence of this hashtag makes it easy to monitor the consumer reactions towards the campaign. On the other hand, this opens an easy-to-reach platform for any member of society to raise their concern on this contradiction. A quick analysis of the tweets with this hashtag showed that there is unanimous support for the campaign with not a single tweet calling out the company for their hypocrisy. The second aspect that adds to the interest in studying this case is the stand of animal rights NGOs. The NGOs that get funding from this campaign, as expected, congratulate Eti for its support, and call the company "their new friend" (Haytap 2020). Additionally, no animal rights NGOs in Turkey called out the contradictions of this campaign.

3. Psychic schemas for stray cats and dogs in Turkey

The three contradictions mentioned in Eti's campaign reveal the magnitude of the spread of the normalization of the different treatment of different species by society. Melanie Joy states that finding it acceptable to eat some animals, whereas feeling disgusted with the idea of eating others, is possible because of the difference in the perception of different species (Joy 2010, 14). She mentions what causes the difference between these perceptions is the psychic schemas, which are built by deeply rooted belief systems (Joy 2010). She then adds, dealing with the incongruence between values (caring for nonhuman animals) and behaviors (eating or causing suffering on some nonhuman animals) is achievable with psychic numbing, which is a psychological phenomenon that makes it possible for humans to emotionally and mentally detach from reality (Joy 2010). The takeaways from Joy which will be used later in the paper are two-fold. Firstly, psychic numbing makes it possible for humans not to think or feel about some of their behaviors. Secondly, deeply rooted belief systems construct the psychic schemas telling people which members of which species can be eaten without remorse and which ones cannot and are key in reinforcing this normalization.

Focusing on the psychic schemas around stray cats and dogs requires an understanding of the psychic schemas for stray dogs in Istanbul. In Islam, the dog is sacred like any other living being but is considered unclean. Therefore, it is acceptable for the dog to live on the streets, and these dogs should be taken care of as they are living beings created by God; however, as they are also deemed unclean by Islam, they cannot live in the houses (Fortuny 2014). Through the more pronounced impact of westernization in Istanbul from the early 1900s on, the psychic schema of stray dogs started carrying western values

too (Fortuny 2014). In the West during the early 1900s, stray animals were either domesticated or were sent into the "wild", aiming at making the streets "animal-free" (Fortuny 2014). The blend of these two psychic schemas challenged the stray dogs of Istanbul keeping the streets of Istanbul as their home as both psychic schemas consider them unclean; however, the crossing of the "sacredness of life" from the psychic schema of Islam and the domestication from the psychic schema of the West made it possible for the stray dogs of Istanbul to keep the streets of Istanbul as their home (Fortuny 2014). Currently, it can be suggested that the stray dogs, as well as the cats of Istanbul, are perceived as neighbors by the residents of Istanbul.

A quick look into the animal rights organizations from the time of Ottoman Empire to the current day provides a valuable understanding of the emphasis on the welfare of stray cats and dogs and little to none attention on the suffering of other nonhuman animals, such as farmed animals that are exploited by the dairy industry. The first animal protection organization of the Ottoman Empire, the İstanbul Society for the Protection of Animals, was established in 1912 in İstanbul, with the help of Lady Lowther, the wife of the British Ambassador after the mass mulling of the stray dogs of İstanbul due to the rabies threat on the human animal residents of İstanbul (Gürler, Menteş and Osmanağaoğlu 2011, 903). With the İstanbul Society for the Protection of Animals being the first of the NGOs working on animal welfare, the animal rights organizations that followed the lead of this society mainly focused on the welfare of the animals, some examples including the welfare of stray animals or working on policy proposals to prohibit the slaughter of pregnant farmed animals (Gürler, Menteş and Osmanağaoğlu 2011, 904). From the early 1900s on, the majority of the NGOs working for nonhuman animals in Turkey worked for stray cats and dogs (Gürler, Menteş and Osmanağaoğlu 2011, 904). Furthermore, within the current NGOs in Turkey working for nonhuman animals, only one NGO (Turkish Vegan Association) works for the abolition of nonhuman animal oppression, and all of the other NGOs merely focus on the welfare of nonhuman animals, with a pronounced emphasis on the stray cats or dogs (TVD 2015).

4. Capitalism as the dominant belief system reinforcing the psychic numbing

In 2013, David Nibert suggested that transcending capitalism is a prerequisite for ending animal domesecration, a term he uses instead of domestication to highlight the inherent violence (Nibert 2013). Nibert proposes three reasons why he believes that transcending capitalism is critical in ending animal domesecration. Firstly, the companies' and elites' use of mass media in order to socially engineer public opinion; secondly, the capitalists' power over government through diverse institutions such as interest groups; and lastly, capitalism rendering the individuals incapable of questioning the learned devaluation of some species through constant insecurity, poverty and deprivation (Nibert 2013, 646-654). The case of Eti Benimo exemplifies all three reasons Nibert provides. Firstly, the Eti Benimo campaign announces its financial support to the NGOs working for the welfare of the stray cats and dogs in the advertisement of the product that uses cow's milk and bovine gelatin. The

company uses this advertisement on various media channels, TV ads, YouTube, online and print ads, as well as carrying it to Twitter through their hashtag. Through all these efforts, the company successfully uses mass media and conveys the message of “It is OK to consume products that cause animal suffering and still love animals” successfully. Secondly, although Eti is not a dairy company, the company is one of the members of The National Milk Council (Ulusal Sut Konseyi 2018). The council's mission translates as: “In the name of development of the industry, The National Milk Council works on development of new policies through scientific research, leads the implementations and takes part in market regulation” (Ulusal Sut Konseyi 2018). The council's mission, in combination with Eti's membership, suggests Eti's power on the government, therefore posing an example of Nibert's second reason. Lastly, the absence of even one single call-out of the hypocrisy of the campaign neither by the general public nor by the NGOs, even the activist groups for animal liberation, showcases the terrifying extent of the normalization of this contradiction. This last aspect resonates with capitalism rendering humans incapable of questioning the devaluation of certain species.

Combining Nibert's (2013) view on capitalism and domeseccration with Joy's (2010) emphasis on belief systems constructing the psychic schemas as well as using psychic numbing as a tool, I argue that capitalism is one of the deep-rooted belief systems reinforcing the normalization of the different treatment of different species if not the most powerful one. Additionally, remembering that Eti's campaign provides examples for all three reasons why Nibert believes that capitalism needs to be transcended to end domeseccration, suggests that Eti's campaign builds a good example on capitalism as a deep-rooted belief system psychologically numbing people and resulting in a continued normalized contradiction between values and behaviors of individuals with regard to nonhuman animals.

5. Difficulty of finding who is responsible: The banality of evil

Through the example of Eti, it can be seen that the actors of society that normalize or contribute to the normalization of the different treatment of different species extend from companies, such as Eti, to the general public. The extent of the normalization makes it harder to pinpoint the entities who are responsible for the normalization in question. The company contributes to it through shaping public opinion using the mass media. In parallel, the NGOs get funding from the company and keep their silence about this contradiction. When it comes to the individuals, whether these are the consumers, individuals working at these companies or at the NGOs, they are either going through psychic numbing which silences them (Joy 2010, 18) or due to the insecurity, poverty and deprivation created by capitalism, they are not in a state to challenge the oppression of devalued nonhuman animals (Nibert 2013, 653). As this example shows us, capitalism as a system distributes the responsibility of this normalization between the entities and makes it almost impossible to name one responsible entity.

I suggest that at this point, it is useful to apply the lesson of "banality of evil" from Hannah Arendt. Arendt says that the "banality of evil" is not a theory nor a term, but a lesson. According to this lesson, the lack of thinking, when thinking refers to reflecting rather than merely being conscious or aware, has the potential of causing a great deal of suffering (Arendt 1964). An ordinary individual, merely following the rules of the dominant system in place and not thinking, could cause a great deal of suffering, and Arendt argues that this individual's intentions being evil or not does not change the responsibility the individual has on the suffering that is caused (Arendt 1964).

After this lesson has been named by Arendt, it has been used frequently in the area of political science to reflect on the suffering caused by humans on humans. However, there is little literature that applies this lesson to the suffering that is exerted on nonhuman animals by human animals. Using Eti's case as a starting point, the dominant system in this case is capitalism. An ordinary human individual could be any individual, from the consumer to the individual working on the creation of this campaign to the individual working at an NGO. As Joy suggests, due to the psychic numbing, the individuals mentally and emotionally block themselves, meaning that they actually do not reflect while acting (Joy 2010). Even though these psychic schemas, which lead to psychic numbing, are created by capitalism, applying Arendt's (1964) banality of evil lesson suggests that each individual that fails to think before they act is responsible for the suffering caused as the result of this act.

6. Conclusion

The paper studied the case of Eti's 2019-launched corporate social responsibility campaign. The campaign showcases the different perceptions human animals have for different species of other animals, as the campaign uses a product that contains cow's milk and bovine gelatin in order to generate funding for the welfare of the stray cats and dogs.

The case of Eti creates an interesting example due to the lack of reaction by the general public or the NGOs to the contradiction posed by the campaign. This lack of reaction draws attention to the spread of normalization of protecting the welfare of members of some species of nonhuman animals, whereas causing suffering to some others. The paper firstly explored the concept of psychic schemas and psychic numbing that are used by the dominant belief systems to understand the normalization of the suffering of some nonhuman animal species as proposed by Joy in 2010. In order to be able to put the case of Eti in context, the paper later explored the psychic schemas of stray dogs and cats in Turkey, and through the history of the organizations working for nonhuman animals, showcased the strong emphasis both the welfarist approach and strong focus on the welfare of the stray cats and dogs in Turkey.

The analysis of the Eti case shows us that the normalization of different treatments of different species of nonhuman animals is very widely distributed between the different actors in society. Through the combination of the works of Joy (2010) and Nibert (2013), the humans' normalization of this contradiction

could be explained through the difficulties exerted on the individuals by capitalism and the psychic schemas constructed by capitalism. However, this approach carries the risk of having no responsible entity for the suffering of the nonhuman animals.

I propose applying the lesson of "banality of evil" from Hannah Arendt for the suffering caused by human animals on nonhuman animals. The banality of evil attracts attention to how an ordinary person simply adhering with the rules of the dominant system without thinking, where thinking refers to reflecting rather than being merely conscious, carries the risk of causing an enormous amount of pain (Arendt 1964). Arendt argues that the ordinary person who does not have any evil intentions but simply fails to reflect before they act should not mean that the person is not responsible for their actions (Arendt 1964). I propose that the use of this notion should put the responsibility for the suffering caused by human animals on nonhuman animals on each one of us. This feeling of responsibility might make it possible for each one of us to reflect before we act and may lead to a change.

Although the lesson of the banality of evil might help with assigning the responsibility on all individuals that act without reflecting, as Nibert suggests, the pressure capitalism exerts on each individual through insecurity, poverty and deprivation is still not resolved through this approach (Nibert 2013, 653). The application of the banality of evil, therefore, might increase the weight of responsibility on the group of people that is already struggling to survive in the cruelty of capitalism.



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