Learning Hope in the Anthropocene: The Party for the Animals and Hope as a Political Practice

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Abstract: This article investigates the role of hope in politics, in the context of the current climate crisis. Hoping for positive transformation may seem naïve and or a way to avoid action, but there is a close connection between hope and democratic action. Understood as a collective political practice, hope can contribute to imagining and articulating alternative futures, and motivate action. The first part of the paper explicates the relevance of the work of Ernst Bloch for the challenges of the Anthropocene. It focuses specifically on learning hope as a collective political practice, the function of utopias in fostering political imagination, and the connection between political agency and hope. The second part of the paper draws on the work of the Dutch Party for the Animals to investigate how political hope can change existing political systems from the inside. In their party program and policies, the Party for the Animals gives central importance to the wellbeing of the earth and all its inhabitants, and demonstrate that a different way of doing politics, based on care and responsibility instead of economic growth, is possible.

Keywords: political philosophy, politics of hope, Bloch, Party for the Animals, Anthropocene politics

Introduction

Humans and other animals are experiencing an ecological crisis in which the survival of our most important common good – the planet – is at stake. Global economic, political and social structures need to change in order to be able to counter this crisis. In the face of ever-accelerating climate change and loss of biodiversity, hoping for positive transformation seems futile – at best naïve and at worst a way to avoid action. However, as the German Marxist phenomenologist Ernst Bloch writes, there is a close connection between hope and democratic action (*The Principle of Hope*). Hope is a necessary ingredient of imagining alternative futures and might guide and direct political action.

In this text I investigate political hope against the background of large-scale ecological collapse, through an exploration of the work of the Dutch Party for the Animals.[1] The Party for the Animals criticises anthropocentrism in its party program and political deeds, and offers a new perspective on doing politics that does not focus on power, humans, and short-term goals. I focus specifically on three themes: the connection between hope and political imagination, learning hope as a political practice, and the relation between hope and political agency. This is not meant to be a full exploration of the role of hope in multispecies politics, nor as a sociological study of the Party for the Animals. Rather, it investigates the relevance of learning hope collectively in times of ecological crisis. While imagining new common life-worlds with other animals should always be a multispecies endeavour, humans have a specific responsibility towards those of other species at this moment in time. Existing human political institutions and practices have a role to play in working towards a less violent future.[2]

1. Hope in political philosophy

When speaking to a group of politicians and businesspeople at the World Economic Forum conference in Davos, environmental activist Greta Thunberg admonished her listeners for the false hope they had been offering in the face of ecological catastrophe: 'We do not want your hope, we want actions. Our house is on fire'. Thunberg is right to state that hope without action

is meaningless. There is however an intimate relationship between hope and democratic action. In order to be able to work towards a more sustainable and fairer world, we need to imagine that world and hope it can be realized.

Hope has not received much attention in political philosophy (Blöser, Huber and Moellendorf). This is not to say that it has been completely absent. Certain political philosophers who do not explicate the role of hope in their work do presuppose it. For example, Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, the capacity of humans to begin anew in the public space by speaking and acting with others, intimately ties together hope and politics. Hope can also be seen as a prerequisite of entering the social contract with others, as Stahl notes with regard to the work of Hobbes and Spinoza. Regarding political deliberation, Rorty writes that democratic communicative engagement presupposes that there can be change for the better, either in the form of agreement or a richer form of disagreement, and thus presupposes hope.

In current liberal democracies the language of hope is an important part of political life, especially during election time. But, similar to Thunberg, many contemporary political philosophers are sceptical about its role in working towards just societies (Blöser, Huber and Moellendorf). Recent years have seen an increase in attention for the topic in political philosophy, something that Blöser, Huber and Moellendorf connect to increasing attention for issues such as racial injustice and the climate crisis, that forces us to systematically think through the normative implications of a discourse of hope, or despair, in political contexts. Blöser, Huber and Moellendorf show that hope is theorized roughly in two ways. Most contemporary philosophers analyse the concept hope as something that is aimed at a specific outcome, one 'hopes that …'. But there are also more radical, or basal, approaches to hope, that do not focus on a specific object, but rather implicate an attitude towards the common social or political world (for example Bloch; Lear). The most prominent example of this latter position is the work of Bloch.

It is a question of learning hope

According to Bloch, hope is both a cognitive faculty – a mode of thinking that requires reasoning and imagination – and an emotion, or an affect. Bloch sees humans as hoping, future-regarding beings. As individuals, humans are unfinished and motivated by dreams of a better life, as well as by utopian longings for fulfillment. Bloch's major work *The Principle of Hope* provides a systematic examination of hope for a better world as expressed in various art forms such as literature, theatre, visual arts, stories such as fairy tales and myths, daydreams, philosophy, political and social theory and religion. He is especially interested in emancipatory moments that question the impact of the capitalist system on human life (Kellner).

The key concept in Bloch's analysis of the human condition is the Not Yet, which has two aspects: the Not Yet Conscious, which is ideological, and the Not Yet Become, which is material. His concept of the Not Yet Conscious is formed through a critique of Sigmund Freud's view of the unconscious. Freud conceptualises the unconscious as repressed material residues that are no longer conscious; Bloch, in contrast, sees the unconscious as a creative force on the verge of coming to consciousness. This coming to consciousness may take shape in a variety of ways, from daydreams to artistic endeavours. When these activities contain hope for a better world or a better way of being in the world, they are, according to Bloch, expressions of utopia.

Expressions of utopia offer a way of moving beyond the present to a better future (Levitas). Here, the Not Yet Conscious connects to the Not Yet Become. Like humans, the material world is essentially unfinished, because the future is an indeterminate realm of possibility. The world is full of possibilities, which can be actualized if their conditions are fulfilled. Against this background we can understand why we need to learn to hope. We need to be able to dream new futures in order to be able to work towards them and fulfill the promise of the Not Yet Become. [3] Learning hope is educational – it can teach us something about what is not here – and can be performative – it can bring about change by showing change is possible.

This brief summary may give the impression that Bloch conceptualizes hope solely as a human endeavour and follows Marx in viewing politics as a human project. However, Bloch stresses the dependence of humanity on nature, and sees nature as dynamic, creative and

productive (*The Principle of Hope*; Geoghegan). Humanity emerged from nature, and a dualist view in which humans are seen as creative and nature as static cannot be sustained. Bloch argues that nature has its own distinctive qualities and sees utopianism not as something that is confined to the human social sphere. The natural subject is also unfinished, and Not Yet, it is not a product of the past, or an underlying substance or entity. Utopianism requires the co-productivity of humanity and nature.

Furthermore, Bloch problematizes the commodification of nature under capitalism. Under the conditions of capitalism, objects, humans, and nature have become objects for sale, relationships have been reduced to their exchange value – including relations with nature – and the circulation of commodities has become an independent force driving human action and interaction. A critique of this ideology cannot focus solely on the human, because that follows from a misguided view of the relation between humanity and nature, and its possible future. Humans are not above or beyond nature, and nature is not static matter. Refiguring the human relation with nature should be part of imagining better worlds, and in this relation, humans should recognize that for nature that as for them, the future is not fixed, but open. These ideas about the interconnectedness of humanity and nature, and the commodification of nature are especially relevant in the context of human-induced climate change and loss of biodiversity that threaten the habitats and lives of many beings and species.

To be sure, Bloch does consider humans to be special animals (for example, *Dialectics and Hope*) and does not envision more-than-human animals as political agents. But if we read his claims about the dynamic interplay between humanity and nature in the light of contemporary insights about animal cultures and languages, there seems to be space for extending his understanding of hope to a multispecies context. A full exploration of the value of his work for animal philosophy lies outside of the scope of this text, that however takes a first step in considering the value of his work for thinking about the more-than-human.

2. Hope in the Anthropocene

Due to human impact on the planet, our current geological epoch has been named by some the Anthropocene. This name can be criticised in several ways (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw). For example, the term implies that all humans are at fault for ecological breakdown, while in fact the climate crisis is due to the impact of a small group of humans, namely humans in the global north, and specifically the very rich.[4] Another problem is that the term places human beings at the centre of the universe, so to speak, and thereby inadvertently cancels the most important task at hand: to discover and build new connections and forms of community with the countless other species that make up the natural world. It also runs the risk of being performative: emphasising human impact can lead to the impression that more human intervention into nature is called for. This is problematic because more intervention risks creating new problems and reinforces human exceptionalism.

However, the name does point out the connection between human exceptionalism and large-scale ecological collapse. Human exceptionalism lies at the basis of many practices, institutions and systems that led to the destruction of ecosystems, global warming and loss of species. Addressing these problems requires more than looking for technological solutions within this system – the technofixes that might alleviate symptoms but leave the underlying causes intact. In order to really confront the problems inherent in the Anthropocene and prevent wholesale destruction of the planet human behaviour in many parts of the world needs to change. Essential to this transformation is the rejection of human exceptionalism; human beings must reposition ourselves within the world as among other beings with whom we share that world.

This project requires political change. Social movements seem to be better suited than political institutions – which are typically human centred and preoccupied with the short term – to criticise the status quo and imagine alternative futures. Despite their shortcomings, however, an argument can be made that existing political institutions and practices can also play a role in this project. Donaldson and Kymlicka, for example, argue that liberal political institutions represent accepted democratic views about equality and justice regarding humans and can

therefore function as a starting point for thinking about and engaging with other beings in a democratic framework. Reforming existing political institutions can also have pragmatic value because the policies they implement can have an immediate impact. Furthermore, deliberative approaches to democracy in particular point to the transformative potential of political interaction (Young). When people from different backgrounds meet to discuss common problems, individuals can change or adapt their views and reach collective agreement.

Learning hope as a political practice

Hope is often conceptualized as a psychological phenomenon, a capacity of the subject. Bloch also describes hope in this way, as a cognitive and emotional faculty. However, forms of hope that imagine a better world or a better way of being in the world, expressions of utopia, contain more than an individual desire. They are a way of moving beyond the social and political present because they aim at transforming the material, intersubjective world. Sharing utopian views with others, discussing their weaknesses and strengths, can bring out flaws in our existing social and political systems. It can also enable change: imagining a different situation is the first step in being able to work towards that situation.

Here, I will focus not on the individual or psychological dimensions of hope, but on learning hope as a social and political practice. I will treat hope not as something that is a given, but as something humans can foster collectively, and learn to do better, in a world shared with other animals. The idea that humans (as other animals) can learn collectively is important, because it opens up space for the new, and what cannot yet be thought. Political learning is underexplored in relation to humans and human systems, which obscures thinking about the future. Neoliberal portrayals of voters as consumers, and politics as power play, do not do justice to the manifold ways in which humans work towards better worlds, for themselves or others, and the potential for change inherent in these.[5]

Learning hope *politically* is necessary because many of the challenges of the Anthropocene are political, even though they are often presented as ethical, a matter of personal preference, or issues left-wingers take up as hobbies. This is true of care for the environment,

respecting more-than-human animals' rights, climate justice, and many other ecological and social issues. Addressing these problems requires more than individual change: it asks for collective action. Acting differently requires political imagination.

Political imagination

According to Bloch, humans should foster political imagination to overcome the alienation inherent to capitalism. In the Anthropocene, the alienation under capitalism that Bloch points to is reinforced by anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism not only sees humans as separated from other animals and the natural world, but also positions the human as the standard to which other beings are measured. This view is inherently flawed – all animals, human and nonhuman, are entangled in relations with others in which they are mutually dependent on other each other (Adams and Gruen). In these relations, nonhuman animals are more than moral or political patients: they actively shape encounters and relations with others, as well as common life worlds (Donaldson and Kymlicka; Haraway; Meijer). These interspecies relations are embedded in a natural world upon which we rely for our survival.

Political imagination in the Anthropocene ought to go beyond simply extending existing political frameworks to include other animals and nature within their rubric, i.e., arguing for animal rights or rights of nature. It ought also to involve sketching a different picture of society altogether. This is necessary for challenging human exceptionalism and developing a new attitude towards the others with whom we share the planet.

Images of new multispecies political societies are created in art and literature, but also in ethology and the new field of political animal philosophy. Animals other than humans have largely been absent from philosophy and particularly political philosophy, even though they were central to constructing an image of the human political actor as not-animal (Meijer 15-35). In recent years however, there have been investigations into how political theories can be extended to include other animals. The most prominent example of this trend is *Zoopolis*, in which Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka develop a political theory of animal rights and show what a multispecies democracy could look like.[6]

Donaldson and Kymlicka propose to extend the concepts that guide political relations between humans, such as democracy, citizenship, sovereignty, and resistance, to include political relations with other animals. They argue that this project necessarily should include nonhuman animals' perspectives. For a long time, nonhuman animals were seen as incapable of having a perspective on the good life or common societies, or seen as not having an interest in co-forming views about common matters, at least in political frameworks in the global north. However, studies in the field of ethology show that animals of many species have complex inner lives and social lives (see Meijer Chapter 1-3 for an overview). Furthermore, their lives are often entangled with human lives, on the individual level but also on the level of social and political groups. Developing a view of a just multispecies society needs to include nonhuman perspectives, because other animals have a unique first-person perspective on their own life, and because otherwise the human again decides what is best for other animals (Donaldson; Donaldson and Kymlicka; Meijer).

Zoopolis has been accused of presenting a utopian view of relations between humans and other animals, and it has been criticized for its emphasis on political animal agency (Cochrane; Garner and O'Sullivan; Pepper). I would argue, however, that the focus on animals' agency in developing new multispecies societies is one of the strengths of the work. For normative reasons: it takes seriously the perspectives of the other animals. But also because it mobilizes the political imagination:[7] it sketches the contours of a political system in which the human is not the standard to which other beings are measured, and it also shows how this new idea of society can be anchored in concepts that were traditionally delineated as solely human, such as democracy or citizenship. Both aspects have a role to play in imagining new futures in the Anthropocene.

Hope and political agency

Humans need new stories in order to be able to act differently. One of the common responses to the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity is despair: the feeling that we are already beyond a tipping point, that nature will not recover and all actions will be futile. Donna Haraway calls this the 'game over' attitude. Hope can help us overcome the paralysis that follows from despair and

can help us act. In the context of climate change, Catriona McKinnon argues that a thin account of hope is necessary and useful, while despair paralyses. When someone despairs, her capacity to act towards a certain goal is impaired and she is less likely to reach that goal. With regard to climate change, many feel like they face an inevitable disaster, so their individual actions will not make a difference. But if everyone thinks this way, nothing will change: companies will keep polluting the environment, and all individuals will keep flying to their holiday destinations, buying new clothes, and eating animals – acts that contribute to climate change. According to McKinnon, we should avoid the self-fulfilling prophecy of the sense of impossibility. This gives us no guarantees, but otherwise we will surely fail. As McKinnon writes: 'Hope keeps open a space for agency between the impossible and the fantastical; without it, the small window in time remaining for us to tackle climate change is already closed' (19).

While McKinnon has a point, there is an underlying issue at stake. Haraway writes that behind the 'game over' attitude we find the idea that things only matter when they succeed. This ties in with one of the fictions of the Anthropocene, which is that the current situation is somehow the result of conscious choices and can therefore be solved by conscious choices, and follows a capitalist mode of thinking about actions and outcomes. While there are clearly many measures that can and should be taken, many of the issues at stake now were unintended side effects of human acts and systems, and we might not be capable of solving them even if we try, or simply not know whether we can solve them. The idea that agency is somehow linked to effectiveness, a fixed outcome, also seems to be part of McKinnon's argument. Haraway asks us to untangle these by separating what works from what matters. In judging our agency, what matters matters too. We may know we cannot fix everything, but hope does not have to be hinged on outcome – it can be a critical political attitude working towards a different future.

Bloch takes a similar view: 'The work of [hope] requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong' (*The Principle of Hope* 3). Although we can imagine different futures and throw ourselves into building them, utopias cannot be achieved – otherwise they would not be utopias anymore. This does not mean they are useless: we need them to orient ourselves, in order to do the kind of work that matters and even to know what matters.

3. The Party for the Animals and learning hope

Hope seems to be the terrain of social movements, not formal politics, because social movements explicitly focus on creating a better world, make use of utopic visions to motivate people and collectively bring pressing social issues to the agenda. For example, hope has always been part of the animal liberation movement, and of the more general search for more just and less violent relations between humans and other animals – abolitionist approaches also presume a better state of affairs is possible. Parliamentary politics is, especially in in neoliberal democracies, often understood as part of what Iris Young calls the 'aggregative' model of democracy. In this model, democracy is viewed as a way of measuring and counting individual interests. However, as Young argues, even in neoliberal democracies that regard voting as the main political deed and approach democracy as a competition, we find glimpses of other modes of doing politics. For example, when ideas are expressed and shared in practices and institutions that foster dialogue, such as public comment moments in city council meetings, discussion evenings in which citizens are consulted about new forms of legislation, or the yearly children's hour in the Dutch Second Chamber, where politicians answer questions of 11- and 12-year-old children. These practices and institutions create space for imagining different futures and this is connected to hope.

The Dutch Party for the Animals also takes change and hope seriously in politics. They shift the focus from a human-centred view of society that is aimed at economic growth to a holistic model that argues against economic growth. They adopt a long-term view on governing society instead of focusing on short-term measures, using the political arena for normative discussions instead of simply bringing the interests of one particular social group to light. Before I discuss how their approach relates to Bloch's view of hope, I will first provide a brief sketch of the Party's origins and work so far.

The Party for the Animals

The Dutch Party for the Animals is a relatively young political party that has enjoyed increasing electoral success. Prominent members and leaders of Dutch animal welfare organisations in

2002 founded the party as an act of protest, after the Balkende I government repealed most of the animal welfare legislation that was in place at that moment. The party entered the national elections in 2006 and two of its members, Marianne Thieme and Esther Ouwehand, were elected to represent the party in the Second Chamber of the House of Representatives. Since then, the Party has grown significantly. In early 2022, there are eighty-one representatives of the Party active on different political levels: six members of the party were elected in the Second Chamber in 2021, there are currently three Party for the Animals politicians in the First Chamber, one in the European Parliament, twenty in the provinces, thirty-four in city councils, and seventeen in the 'waterschappen', the water government councils.[8]

Their success can be explained in part by the nature of the Dutch political system. The Netherlands has a multi-party system and governments are formed by a coalition of different political parties, often including smaller parties who band together to gain a majority. Members of parliament are elected every four years, using a proportional representation system.[9] This system gives small parties the chance of winning a seat. Dutch voters vote for parties rather than individual candidates, so the focus in election time is less on the individual representatives and more on the ideas of the parties. Moreover, representatives do not represent districts but the country as a whole.

This system means that smaller parties can have a voice in debates and influence decision-making. An example of how this works can be found in the SGP, the *Staatskundig Gereformeerde Partij*. They are the most conservative religious (Protestant) party, and usually have one or more representatives in the Second Chamber, who are known to initiate certain discussions and debates, for example about abortion or euthanasia. The system also allows for the possibility of a small party's sudden growth. An example is the *Socialistische Partij* (SP), the socialist party, which began in 1972 as a marginal left-wing Marxist/socialist party. The party grew quickly and won twenty-five seats at the 2006 elections.

Even though the party is relatively small, the Party for the Animals' work has influenced the Dutch political discourse, as well as policies and legislation. They also manage to affect public debate, for example by highlighting the suffering of animals in industrial farming, or

educating citizens about the connections between animal exploitation in the Netherlands and the destruction of the Amazon rainforest for the production of soy for animal feed, and actively assist animal parties in different countries around the world by sharing knowledge and expertise.

Their work is not restricted to official political settings, such as parliament or provinces. They have a scientific bureau that organises conferences, publishes reports and creates documentaries. Former and current party leaders Marianne Thieme and Esther Ouwehand write books. Members and leaders of the party often take part in street demonstrations. Local parties may organise many different types of activities, that range from picking up litter to organising lectures and film screenings, and may organise protests or events together with civil society organisations.

It is not possible in this paper to provide a complete overview of the changes they managed to implement, but they include the following examples.[10] In national politics, they proposed a ban on mink breeding which was accepted in 2013, and then the Party managed to advance this ban from 2024 to 2020; there was a Covid-19 outbreak in mink farms in 2020, and the Party for the Animals successfully proposed to shut them down completely after the minks were killed, instead of allowing the mink farmers to begin again. They also successfully proposed a ban on the live cooking of lobsters in 2021, and wrote an amendment to the *Wet Dieren*, Law concerning the animals, which was accepted in 2021. This amendment states that animals can no longer be changed physically or genetically to adjust to their housing conditions, but instead that the housing conditions should change to accommodate the farmed animals' species-specific needs and individual welfare. However, there is discussion about the implementation of this amendment, so while in theory it implies the end of industrial farming and possibly all animal agriculture, it is hard to predict how it will affect further legislation and policy making. An example that focuses on humans is a motion accepted in 2021 to structurally improve the health of Dutch citizens, by focusing on prevention of diseases, including zoonoses.

In the European Parliament, the Party for the Animals managed to secure a ban on thiacloprid, a pesticide that is very harmful for bees, in 2020, and a ban on Mancozeb, a pesticide associated with Parkinson's Disease, in 2019. On the level of provinces, the Party for the

Animals Noord-Holland managed to establish structural financial support for wildlife rehabilitation centres in 2020, and solar panels around Schiphol in 2021. To make politics more inclusive for humans, in 2020 they successfully proposed the province uses clear and simple language when addressing citizens. On the local level, a proposal for nature-inclusive building was accepted in The Hague in 2016, which was aimed at making space for sparrows, swallows and bats, and greening public spaces and new buildings, benefiting human and nonhuman inhabitants. In Amsterdam, all municipal catering is vegetarian unless someone asks for meat instead of the other way around, following a proposal of the Party for the Animals in 2019.

A sceptic could say that some of these examples show a willingness to compromise their ideals. Banning the live cooking of lobsters is not the same as banning the eating of lobsters. Catering that is 'vegetarian unless' is not catering that is fully vegan. Financial support for wildlife rehabilitation centres does not solve many of the problems that Dutch wild animals face; banning cars would be much more efficient. All of this is true. However, the Party for the Animals constantly emphasises that these smaller changes are first steps in a larger project which is aimed at justice for all. Also, some of their successes fully end harmful practices, while certain smaller victories save the lives of individual animals, for example the funding of animal ambulances. Furthermore, the full list of examples shows that the Party for the Animals changes the story of politics, by taking seriously the interests of nonhuman animals and defending these interests. Their efforts are also demonstrative of the entanglement between human and more-than-human interests. Changing the narrative matters democratically and is interconnected with learning hope.

The Party for the Animals and political imagination

When the Party for the Animals started out, their main focus was on nonhuman animals and environmental issues. In their first party program ('Partij voor de Dieren 2006'), they navigated between an animal welfare and animal rights perspective. Their current perspective is more holistic and focuses on a sustainable future for all the earth's inhabitants. In the national elections in 2017, their campaign slogan was 'there is no planet B'. In the party program of these

elections, they connected justice for animals to justice for humans (including those who reside within the Netherlands and those who reside abroad and are affected by Dutch consumption patterns) ('Partij voor de Dieren 2017'). In television debates they were the only party to explicitly state that they do not want to seek economic growth because it is actually bad for the planet.

The Party for the Animals' political imagination works on two levels. On the one hand, it presents a different picture of society based on the idea that human beings can establish just relations with other animals, the natural world, and other humans. While this may lead to certain inconveniences and obstacles to life as we know it – flight taxes and an end to car culture and industrial farming, for example – it is necessary in order to work towards justice for all animals, and it will lead to a more ecologically sustainable and less violent world (Partij voor de Dieren 2017).

On the other hand, they present a new way of doing politics. They reject the larger anthropocentric neoliberal framework underlying most political decision-making. They see politics as a vehicle for change for all members of society, human and nonhuman, instead of a competition for votes. Specifically, they argue that politics and rights are not about safeguarding the interests or property of the powerful, but instead about protecting the interests of the vulnerable: nonhuman animals, humans in different countries around the world affected by the Dutch consumption practices and patterns, future generations, and vulnerable humans in the Netherlands, including the poor. With the protection of the vulnerable as their aim, they offer an alternative view on how to govern societies, and on who and what is governed. They work towards change within the current system – as the examples mentioned above illustrate – but also often file motions and make proposals aimed at structural change, such as ending industrial farming.[11,12]

Arguing against economic growth and promoting a decentring of the human may appear to some to be utopian fancy, or at least a position that will never convince the majority of the voting population. That said, even the party's opponents grant that the presence of the Party for the Animals in the political arena has forced other parties to address environmental and animal

welfare/rights issues they may have otherwise happily ignored. Furthermore, the Party for the Animals aims to find long-term solutions for problems that many people find hard to imagine already, such as the impact of climate change, and messages that go beyond the four-year period between elections generally do not sell well. However, as Bloch shows, it is essential to imagine a different world before one can work towards it. The Party for the Animals does present a clear alternative to the status quo, in politics and broader society.

Furthermore, the status of the Party for the Animals has changed in recent years. While they were seen as a one-issue party in 2006, they are increasingly viewed as a party with a multifaceted and relevant agenda (Kieskamp). Their increasing legitimacy is connected to the changes in their program, but might also have to do with the ecological collapse we are facing and that most people are now unable to deny. Ending industrial farming seemed virtually impossible twenty years ago. Now, especially with the Covid-19 outbreak that presses us to reconsider our consumption of animals (Wernecke et al.), for example, the prospect of replacing industrial farming with sustainable and ecologically sound plant-based food production has entered into the mainstream. The same applies to the climate crisis and the loss of biodiversity, matters that were long seen as frivolous but in recent years have moved into public view. In the Dutch public debate, the Party for the Animals has played an important part in this change. For example, party leader Esther Ouwehand was a frequent guest in talk shows on radio and television in 2020 and 2021, to discuss how zoonoses such as Covid-19 and the climate crisis are interconnected with the exploitation of other animals and the planet. Ouwehand also wrote a book about zoonoses and its links with animal exploitation, which links human health to the health of other animals and the planet.

The Party for the Animals' change in status can also be explained by viewing their demands as what Kathi Weeks calls 'utopian demands'. A utopian demand is a political demand that goes beyond pragmatic reforms of the status quo. It asks for substantial transformation of the configuration of social relations. As such, it raises eyebrows. Utopian demands take time and are difficult but not entirely impossible to realize. However, in order for them to be accepted by larger society and political bodies, political discourse needs to shift so that a utopian demand is regarded as practical and reasonable. This can be made possible by the efforts of social justice

movements, and, in this instance, smaller political parties. 'Utopian' here does not necessarily refer to a full-fledged image of a better society; it can be a glimpse of a part of that society, or something that inspires the imagination and helps construct alternatives, no matter how piecemeal, to the status quo.

According to Weeks, these glimpses of utopia affect people. They can provoke desires and animate the political imagination, and as such they can serve both as inspiration and stir political will.

Learning hope as a political practice: There is no planet B

Bloch sees humans and the natural world as unfinished, and writes that in order to work towards a better world, we need to learn hope. He connects hope to imagining other futures and stresses its intersubjective dimensions: hope is not simply a sentiment, but can be seen as a political practice. This idea of hope has an educative and a performative dimension, that we find in the work of The Party for the Animals as well. The Party for the Animals educates Dutch citizens about hope by showing that a better future is possible and sketching what it could look like. This has a performative dimension: it makes space in political discourse – on the level of parliament, but also province and city council – for discussing and working towards a different future.

The Party for the Animals often emphasizes that we only have one planet, and that humans share this planet with many other creatures. Taking care of this common environment should be a central cause of concern in political action. They address this care on different levels of society, ranging from the global level where adequate measures need to be taken to mitigate the climate crisis, extinction of species and loss of biodiversity, to the local level, where they for example work towards greening cities, rescue cows who escaped from the slaughterhouse, or buying agricultural land in order to turn it into nature reserves.

Philosopher Bonnie Honig draws specific attention to importance of common 'public things', like parks, for collective democratic action, and she connects these to political hope. Like Bloch, Honig argues that the idea of hope as a driving force in societal change is important

for thinking about democracy in our current age. She sees hope as particularly pressing when it comes to imagining what comes after our current political system, to which she refers as the 'postwelfare state'. Also like Bloch, she stresses the collective or intersubjective dimension of hope because the issues we are faced with, are not solely ethical but, and perhaps more importantly, also political. In her discussion of hope, Honig connects its intersubjective potential to 'common public things', or what she calls a holding environment.

Under the conditions of capitalism common public things have been subject to erosion. There has been a lack of funding for 'public schools, hospitals, sewage systems, transportation systems, communications airwaves, prisons, town councils, local and national parks, public energy projects' (624). This is a democratic problem, Honig argues, because political action needs to be embedded in a lifeworld that consists of more than words and deeds. Also, people need things that matter to us collectively – common objects that demand our attention, care, and contestation – in order to be able to adequately address the atomization, alienation, and desolation of people under neoliberal capitalism. Honig argues that these public things do more than provide rules to guide political behaviours or coordinate collective action: they affect people, help them the preserve memories and imagine futures, and with this, they can shape our hopes (see Donaldson for an exploration of these ideas in a multispecies context).

For Honig, the catastrophe we are facing is brought about by neoliberal capitalism. She connects this catastrophe to ecological disaster, but does not discuss this connection in detail. However, it could be argued that our most fundamental holding environment is the planet earth. The Party for the Animals draws attention to the importance of a holding environment on the level of the planet – there is no planet B, but also in very local settings. For example, through working for the preservation of green public things such as nature reserves and parks, that can play a role in connecting humans from different political backgrounds. While the more abstract struggles the Party for the Animals has engaged in, such as striving to meet the Paris climate agreement goals or successfully blocking the European Union-Mercosur free trade agreement, may not bring parties closer together, saving trees in cities, abolishing pesticides, and supporting animal shelters and animal ambulances might. These issues are of immediate

relevance for the nonhuman animal publics involved, and also create an understanding of human democratic responsibility beyond the human. Through speaking about and striving for these green common public things, that matter to many, humans might learn hope collectively.

Party for the Animals and political agency

Presenting a hopeful image of the future and fighting for a common holding environment can motivate individuals and enable collective action. Above, two clear challenges for political agency in the Anthropocene came into view. Developing a non-anthropocentric conception of politics with other animals, and moving beyond the 'game over' attitude. To this we can add the fact that different human groups do not share a common framework of reference in which political issues can be discussed; for example, climate change denialism takes place in a different discourse or even paradigm than scientific and activist calls for change.

The work of the Party for the Animals probably challenges the 'game over' attitude more effectively than its political counterparts. Based on scientific insights, they do present a plan B. Whether their plan B will save the world is impossible to ascertain, but it does point us to what matters, and creates space for humans, including many young politicians, to organize their efforts. The Party for the Animals is growing, which shows that their perspective is gaining popularity and their concerns about nonhuman animals and the environment are shared by a growing number of people.

Whether they can unite different worldviews, and thus motivate enough collective agency to make a change remains to be seen. Caring about the planet and its inhabitants is, in the Netherlands as in many countries in the global north, seen as an issue of the left, and the position of the Party for the Animals is no exception. However, their work does contribute to a new type of narrative, especially in concrete cases. Most importantly, it positions the earth centrally as a space of common interest for all Dutch people irrespective of political stripe.

This leaves the challenge of working towards a truly non-anthropocentric politics which is important for doing justice to more-than-human animals and for decentring the human. The

Party for the Animals operates within a human political framework, embracing the tactics and tools of existing liberal democracies. While their work is informed by recent research about animal capacities,[13] and argues that we should regard nonhuman animals as political patients, they do not actively seek out alliances with nonhuman animals. They are open to exploring this but have no concrete plans in this direction (personal communication), something that is necessary to further develop democratic multispecies communities and ways of doing politics. Still, in their image of the future humans are not the only beings who matter, and they present a holistic view of society in which interspecies relationality is recognized.

Learning hope has an educational function and a performative function. In the work of the Party for the Animals, the educational value seems more evident than the performative value: it is easy to see how the party educates citizens and fellow politicians, but they have not completely changed our view of politics yet. Perhaps, though, educational and performative aspects cannot be separated easily in thinking about societal change. Educating citizens by doing politics differently, and painting a different image of the future and the place for humans in that future, enables a new type of political practice, which is not aimed at preserving sovereignty but at caring for others.

4. Ideology and hope

Hope can play a role in moving towards a more ecologically sustainable and less violent world. But hope is not innocent. The hopes of many humans are shaped by ideology and there is a strong role for political imagination and hope in motivating political action in fascist or racist movements.

Bloch rightly draws attention to the fact that learning hope requires ideology critique. According to Bloch, past utopias contain the failures and tragedies of humanity, but are also reservoirs of unrealized hope: they contain what can be. This dreaming about the future is always embedded in a concrete past. As Kellner notes: 'Bloch urges us to grasp the three dimensions of human temporality: he offers us a dialectical analysis of the *past* which illuminates the *present* and can direct us to a better *future*' (81).

Hope is interconnected with ideology critique in different ways (Kellner). While ideologies contain errors and are sites for domination and manipulation, they also hold a utopian promise that tells us something about the human psychology the ideology is connected to. Examining ideology can thus function as a starting point for social critique and developing progressive politics. Marxist ideology critique focuses mainly on political texts, but Bloch also draws attention to the ideological aspects of daily phenomena, such as popular culture, daydreams, Hollywood films or architecture. With this in mind, Bloch draws attention to the non-rational aspects of human motivation, such as desires, beliefs, and fantasies. For him, cultural critique is a political practice that is always connected to dismantling ideology and exposing utopian potential. For Bloch, in the mid-twentieth century, dismantling ideology meant attacking fascism, capitalism, and philosophical idealism, on one hand, and promoting socialism on the other (*ibid*.).

The Party for the Animals directly confronts the political challenges of the Anthropocene, such as overcoming human exceptionalism and learning to deal differently with the planet and all its inhabitants. Articulating a new politics of the Anthropocene is a form of ideology critique that draws attention to how neoliberal capitalism has distorted relations between humans and other animals and the natural world, and has presented a picture of political progress as economic progress, disregarding social and ethical endeavours.

Even in the current situation, however, we find utopian potential, and glimpses of hope for a more peaceable multispecies future. In politics, social movements, but also in recent proposals to view farmed animal sanctuaries as multispecies communities in which animals of different kinds co-create new forms of political life (jones). In popular culture, these glimmers of hope can also be found, for example, in children's books, works of art that take challenge anthropocentrism, or in certain portrayals of relations between humans and their companion animals and other interspecies friendships.

5. Conclusion: A politics of hope

Cultural, social and political transformation can be sudden, but more often it is a lengthy process. Existing political systems can play a role in processes of transformation by enabling deliberation and establishing new types of legislation. It is important to view these new political practices and institutions as starting points and not end points. For example, the attribution of rights to a marginalized or oppressed group (such as nonhuman animals) is sometimes expected to solve the problems faced by the group in question – once this or that group has rights, their position is safeguarded. However, the granting of rights is only the beginning of a new relation, a new set of conversations. The achievement of rights for women did not solve women's oppression and sexism by any stretch of the imagination, but it made possible new types of relations and expressions and new ways of structuring society and institutions, without defining a fixed outcome.

Practicing a non-anthropocentric politics asks not only for changing the subject matter to include the more-than-human world. It also asks for a new approach to politics that situates humans in a larger whole and places central focus on nonhuman animals, the natural world, and future generations. The Party for the Animals shows that democratic politics can be a way to achieve social and environmental progress, and that parties can focus on taking responsibility for the wellbeing of the vulnerable, instead of engaging in power struggles or measuring value in economic terms.

Hope is part of this project, and it requires work. Even though individuals can feel hopeful, political hope is not something that is given, but rather something that is enacted collectively. The collectives enacting hope are not just human. Exploring how other animals hope and how hope can be fostered in multispecies settings is a question for another text, but it is clear that many animals have their own ideas about how the future should look, and strive for a better life when they have the chance.

Further exploring the role of hope in official politics can complement formulating alternatives and developing new political practices lie outside of these structures (Donaldson; Meijer). Reality is always unfinished, as Bloch rightly states, and different kinds of political

stories present us with different perspectives. Finding new ways of becoming rooted in the world and of developing non-anthropocentric political practices and institutions ultimately demands action from different directions: culture, social movements, and political practices. Like philosophical thought, this project will never be completed. It is a practice in which we learn to do better by listening to the natural world and the other animals, making use of new insights from scientific thought and ethology. Whether these efforts can counter the current ecological crisis is unclear. But it does matter.

Notes

[1] I was a 'lijstduwer', list pusher, for the Party for the Animals at the national elections of 2017 and 2021. Lijstduwers are the last candidates on a party list in the Netherlands, Belgium and Suriname, usually well-known people like artists, writers, celebrities, sports people and famous former politicians. While a lijstduwer is officially a candidate, the function is symbolic because they are unelectable; they are on the list to endorse the party and attract more votes. In theory a lijstduwer could get enough preference votes to win a full seat, but most lijstduwers would decline that, with the exception of politicians. The Party for the Animals usually has many lijstduwers on their list in comparison to other parties, it is one of the ways in which they reach new audiences.

[2] This is not the only possible route to take towards non-anthropocentric and multispecies forms of politics. For example, in animal sanctuary studies, new forms of multispecies community are enacted, that can function as the basis for new forms of democracy. Both forming new multispecies communities and engaging differently with other animals, and investigating how existing institutions and practices can change for the better, is necessary in working towards a less violent future, and these different approaches can complement each other.

[3] Part of Bloch's views about the relation between hope and action seems to be empirical. Many question whether or not hope indeed leads to action, or whether despair might be a better

motivation (McKinnon). While my main interest here is with the philosophical structure of the concept hope, and not its psychological dimensions, there is some evidence that backs up Bloch's claim with regard to climate change. In a study aimed at middle school children, Stevenson et al. found that fostering climate change hope and concern related positively to behaviour, while despair related negatively to behaviour. Climate change can lead to despair, denial and inaction, yet climate hope and concern can encourage productive responses. Hope thus does more than mitigate the negative effects of climate change despair; it may precede behavior. Climate literacy alone makes children more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. See also Eckersley for a discussion of the connection between hope and activism and Fritze et al. for a discussion of the connection between hope and mental health in the context of climate change.

[4] For example, a recent study showed that the EU top 1% of households have an average CF share associated with air travel of 41%, making air travel the consumption category with the highest carbon contribution among the top emitters (Ivanova and Wood).

[5] While I focus on hope in relation to human politics, it is worth noting that collective learning is also part of improving multispecies relations. Nonhuman animals are in theory and political life still often considered to be stuck in their lifeworlds, instead of open to new forms of community (Meijer). For example, there are still the widespread misunderstandings that animals have no sense of time and live in a continuous now, and that they live in some form of anarchy. In fact, social animals normally follow rules, many social animals have their own cultures or cultures shared (or not) with humans, and many social animals can adapt to living in new communities, such as those offered by animal sanctuaries. They learn and make sense of new experiences in the light of memories of earlier experiences.

[6] Please note that I do not want to defend a specific model of democracy in this text, my interest lies with the role that existing political models can play in thinking about political transformation.

[7] Mobilizing the political imagination can also play a role in helping human beings to learn to 'listen' to other animals. By listening to other animals, I mean being attentive to them and interacting with them in new ways to find out their perspective on matters of shared interest. This can be a starting point for political and social change.

[8] The 'waterschappen' are a government layer that focuses on water management. Their responsibilities include building dykes and preventing water pollution.

[9] The Dutch parliament, or the States-General (Staten-Generaal), is made up of two chambers. The upper is called the First Chamber or the Senate (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal), and it has seventy-five members elected by twelve provincial councils. The lower and more influential chamber is the Second Chamber or House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal), which has a hundred and fifty members.

[10] A full list of successes can be found on the website of the Party for the Animals, https://www.partijvoordedieren.nl/successen.

[11] Marianne Thieme famously ended every speech she gave in the Second Chamber with the words: 'En voorts ben ik van mening dat er een einde moet komen aan de bio-industrie.' which translates as 'And I also am of the opinion that industrial animal farming should end.'

[12] Dutch parliamentary debates can be watched here: https://debatgemist.tweedekamer.nl/zoeken?search_api_views_fulltext=partij%20voor%20de%20dieren.

[13] See for example the work of the Nicolaas Pierson Foundation, https://www.ngpf.nl, their scientific bureau.

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Acknowledgements

I thank the two anonymous reviewers and editors Alex Lockwood, Melissa Boyde and Sally Borrell for their comments and questions.