

ANIMAL LIBERATIONIST RESPONSES TO NON-ANTHROPOGENIC ANIMAL SUFFERING

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Abstract

Animal liberationists generally pay little attention to the suffering of animals in the wild, and it is arguable that this is a significant proportion of the total amount of animal suffering. We examine a range of different responses of animal liberationists to the issue of non-anthropogenic suffering, but find none of them entirely satisfactory. Responses that lead logically to the conclusion that anthropogenic suffering should be eliminated can apply equally logically to the suffering of animals in the wild. On the other hand, the solution of micro-managing habitats to prevent suffering is counter-intuitive, and on closer examination eliminates the intrinsic value of animals' lives. On balance, the approach that we favour is acceptance of the intrinsic value of individual animal lives, extending this from either individual human lives (as accepted predominantly by theists), or from biodiversity, species and ecosystems (as currently accepted by ecocentric philosophies). We also suggest that the combination of animal liberation and environmentalism only really makes sense in the context of a belief in the redeemable qualities of nature, as expressed in quasi-Hindu terms or in terms of some Biblical animal liberationist worldviews.

Keywords: animal rights, wild animals, intrinsic value, animals and religion, animal suffering, animal liberation

Introduction

Perhaps the most popular objection to veg(etari)anism and animal liberationism is that eating and otherwise exploiting animals is “natural”. When a practice is defended as “natural”, this can mean that it does not violate the *telos* of what it means to be human (Burgess and Walsh 1998).

However, claims that exploiting animals is “natural” are not often formulated in these terms. What the objector often means is that predation and other animal suffering occurs in nature, and would continue even were humans to stop eating and otherwise exploiting animals. Animal liberation would consequently result in little significant change in animal well-being. The following is an example of such a viewpoint:

The only way to put an end, once and for all, to Nature's cruelty to animals as expressed in the behaviour of other animals, would be to kill the lot of them and have done with it. Such a mass cull, according to vegans, would be "murder", yet for as long as there is life on earth, life will destroy other life. (Fitzroy 1999)

For an animal liberationist, there are several possible responses to arguments of this type, and these are explored in this article. The disputes between the various responses to the problems of non-anthropogenic animal suffering are not purely academic, because animal liberationists should be prepared to respond openly and honestly to people such as Fitzroy. Equally importantly, one's response strongly colours one's practical approach to animal liberation: people who hold different views will be likely to advocate very different approaches to issues such as environmental destruction, the creation of nature reserves, the reintroduction of locally extinct animal species (especially carnivores), and the keeping of pets.

Animal liberationism is used here to mean the belief that suffering, death and harm to individual non-human animals above a certain level of sentience deserves a high level of human concern, and that animals are to be respected as independent beings. This leaves open the question whether one considers animal lives to be equally valuable to those of humans, or merely of non-negligible value. It also leaves open the level of sentience required for concern.¹

Liberationists generally reject the prevailing Western view that animals can be used for human benefit as food, clothing, entertainment and scientific "models". Liberationism can be contrasted with welfarism. Welfarists often work with the agricultural or pharmaceutical industries. As such they have no ethical objections to using animals for human benefits, their moral concern is generally limited to ensuring animals do not suffer physically or psychologically when placed in human care. One point of difference between welfarists and liberationists is the emphasis placed on painless death (McMahan 2002). To a welfarist this is not something with which we need to concern ourselves.² On the other

¹ The level of sentience required for concern is discussed in detail by Gary Varner (1998).

² Animal welfare advocate John Webster (1994) for example dismisses animal death on the basis that all animals will die anyway. Whether he takes the same casual attitude to human death based on the same undeniable premise is not

hand, death and other deprivation, whether or not the animal knows they are being deprived, is a real moral concern to a liberationist (Regan 1988).

The two ethical theories most commonly used to argue for animal liberation are utilitarianism (a form of consequentialism), as espoused by Peter Singer (1991), and rights theory, as espoused, in somewhat different versions, by Tom Regan (1988, 2004) and Richard Ryder (1992). We do not intend to choose between these viewpoints here, and we have therefore avoided use of the term “animal rights”. For most of this article it makes little difference to which ethical school one subscribes, and, for what it is worth, we tend to agree with the classicist Richard Sorabji:

I do not think we have to adopt any moral theory at all, and certainly not any moral theory of this unifying type which seeks, as far as possible, to boil down all considerations to one. So long as I am speaking not to moral sceptics, but to moral people who have no wish to hurt their fellow human beings, why should I not speak as follows? *Whatever* protects our fellow humans (and I have no theory to tell me what does), the same will protect animals, to the extent that they do not differ in morally relevant ways. (1993: 217)

We also do not intend to argue whether having compassion for animals involves struggling against one’s natural inclination, as Singer, Regan and Ryder tend to emphasise, or liberating oneself from the socio-economic forces arrayed against compassion, as Brian Luke maintains (1995). Nevertheless, we do examine in detail a number of ethical theories that are less commonly relied upon in discussions about animal liberation, because these are directly relevant to the responses provided by liberationists to non-anthropogenic suffering.

Response 1: Anthropogenic Animal Suffering is Worse Than Natural Suffering

Let us start by quoting Richard Dawkins, the well-known ethologist and Darwinist populariser:

mentioned. Another well known advocate of animal welfare who rejects a full liberationist position is Dr Temple Grandin, animal welfare consultant at MacDonalds (www.grandin.com).

The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive; others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear; others are being slowly devoured from within by rasping parasites; thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst and disease. (Dawkins 1995)

In this passage, Dawkins is not actually concerned with animal liberation, but with arguing against the goodness and/or existence of God. A theist who wished to dispute Dawkins on this point could argue that animals are capable of little or no suffering. Indeed, part of the motivation for René Descartes and his followers in their arguments against animal sentience was that the suffering of animals, who are innocent of even original sin, presented obvious difficulties for Christian theodicy (Thomas 1983: 34). However, although Cartesian and quasi-Cartesian views are not indefensible, they eliminate the case for animal liberation, and therefore need not be discussed here.

One can also argue that animals actually suffer in the wild much less than Dawkins maintains. The human perception of wild animal suffering may be greatly exaggerated, for several reasons. Firstly, wildlife films and television sometimes involve the deliberate staging of predation, and some critics go so far as to describe them as pornographic (Donovan and Adams 1995: 6). Secondly, animals used for hunting and fighting are deliberately bred to be vicious, but their behaviour is sometimes imagined to be natural. Thirdly, as argued more than a century ago by the anarchist biologist Petr Kropotkin (1902), the view of the natural world as a sphere of unremitting conflict and competition, taught by classical Darwinists in nineteenth-century Britain and sociobiologists in the modern USA, may show more about the imperial capitalism of those societies than about wild animals (Donovan and Adams 1995: 6). Fourthly, feminist critics do have a point when they object to the macho, quasi-erotic subtext to the more wilderness-oriented forms of environmentalism, with wild animals celebrated as living untamed lives of lust and violence (Donovan and Adams 1995: 6-7).

However, assuming that one steers clear of the wildest shores of postmodernism and solipsism, it is not obvious how one can deny that death for herbivores is often drawn-out and painful,

that accidents and disease are common, and that hunger is, especially for carnivores, an ever-present threat. With greater awareness of animal emotions and feelings, there is more evidence to suggest that herbivores are capable of finer shades of suffering, such as constant fear of predators, and the grief that comes with losing a loved one (Masson and McCarthy 1995).

The remaining position is that non-anthropogenic animal suffering, although real and severe, is less horrific than much anthropogenic suffering. The worst cases of suffering caused by humans, in terms of both severity and numbers, would have to be factory farming. In 2002 there were approximately 340 million layer hens, 26 million pigs and 8000 million broiler chickens in production in the USA alone,³ a vast proportion of which would be severely confined (Eisnitz 1997). Severe confinement results not only in crippling physical pain, but emotional suffering to the point of insanity, through boredom, frustration and the inability to express natural patterns of behaviour (Weaver and Morris 2004, Morris 2006). In her exposé of the meat industry, Eisnitz (1997) documents how scalding, stabbing, beating, electrocuting, freezing, and deliberate torture of animals is a common occurrence in US slaughterhouses.

When one considers the approximately 8000 million animals per year slaughtered in the US alone (Eisnitz 1997), adds those slaughtered in other countries, and factors in vivisection, rodeos, circuses, zoos, hunting, fur farms, fur trapping, puppy mills, rodent extermination, etc., the total amount of anthropogenic suffering in the world is staggering.

It is therefore not unreasonable to consider the lives of animals in factory farms and laboratories to be far worse than the lives of wild animals. However, while this is a useful argument for activists to tackle the worst excesses of anthropogenic suffering first, it is not an argument for dismissing the very real suffering of animals in the wild.

³ Statistics are derived from the USDA website: <http://www.usda.gov/nass/pubs/histdata.htm> (accessed November 2004).

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*Response 2: Non-Anthropogenic Suffering is
of No Concern to Humans*

Almost certainly, the most common animal liberationist position is that the central aim should be “letting animals be” (Regan 1988: 357), in other words, interfering with them as little as possible (Singer 1991, Regan 1988: 395). At least in our (the authors’) countries (the UK and New Zealand), the animal liberation movement is often closely linked with environmentalism. A popular argument is that if everyone adopted a vegan or near-vegan diet, the world human population could be supported on a small fraction of the earth’s land area. Large areas could then be left as wildernesses or lightly managed environments, of which the only human use, if any, would be for hiking, eco-tourism, and so on. Even a country as densely populated as England is mostly used as pasture, or for growing cereals to feed to domestic animals, and this area could all be allowed to reforest if the demand for animal foods were to cease. This view presupposes that the existence of wilderness or semi-wilderness, with complex animal ecologies, is a good thing for an animal liberationist, which contradicts Dawkins’ view of the horrors of the natural world.

Singer (1991) takes the position that humans need have no concern about non-anthropogenic animal suffering. However, he does not defend it in detail, and it is a difficult case to make, for several reasons, as discussed below.

One could argue that the only wrongs about which one need be concerned are those for which one is oneself (partly and indirectly) responsible. For example; some humanitarians (human liberationists) may argue that the moral requirement of rich Westerners to strive to end human oppression and exploitation is because much of the suffering in poor countries, and among the poorest classes in our own countries, is caused by the historic and current policies of our governments, which we support by paying taxes and participating in civil affairs. In addition, we participate in the global market from relatively privileged positions, thus benefiting from historic and current injustice. By analogy, one should strive to reduce the amount of animal suffering caused by humans, but one is under no equivalent moral compulsion to reduce the suffering caused by other animals or by natural events. However, there are two major difficulties with this position:

1. Probably most humanitarians, while acknowledging one's personal responsibility for human suffering, would argue that the moral aim is to strive for the general reduction of oppression and exploitation, not solely that for which we are responsible either individually or collectively. A humanitarian from Norway, say, may without absurdity campaign against human rights abuses in Tibet, without any implication that either Norway or rich Europe is directly or indirectly responsible for those abuses.
2. Although one does bear some personal responsibility for the wrongs committed by one's own nation and class, it is difficult to see how one is similarly responsible for wrongs committed by someone who simply happens to be a member of the same species. Therefore, suffering caused to animals by other animals would be on the same moral level as anthropogenic suffering for which one has no personal responsibility. However, probably few American animal liberationists would concede that the torturing of bears in China, by Chinese people, to provide bile for the internal Chinese market, requires only the same consideration as the torturing of zebras by hyenas in Kenya.

Even if one were to accept that we need be concerned solely about wrongs for which our own species is responsible, much of the suffering that would occur in semi-wilderness reserves would be anthropogenic, as these areas would require some degree of management. For example, they would need to be policed to prevent hunting, pollution and arson, and many would be small, so would need to be securely fenced, enabling carnivores to corner herbivores. Furthermore, the carnivores in zoos, laboratories, fur-farms and circuses would have to be released, and this would coincide with the need to introduce predators to avoid herbivore overpopulation. There have been a number of programmes to reintroduce predators, such as wolves in Yellowstone Park (Wexler 1997) and black-footed ferrets on the Prairies (Dobson and Lyles 2000), and these have presumably resulted in a great deal of herbivore suffering.

Bizarrely, some animal liberationists argue that predation is not an evil, as predators are not moral agents, and are therefore incapable of violating the prey animals' rights (Regan 1988: 284-285):

“The total amount of suffering animals cause one another in the wild is not the concern of morally enlightened wildlife management” (Regan 1988: 357). Stephen Clark shows why such a position is untenable:

if their [predators'] victims genuinely have rights, and the same rights that humans are presumed to have, then they have a claim on us to be protected in their enjoyment of those rights. If a criminal psychopath attacks my neighbour, and I do nothing to assist her when I could, it is I (not the psychopath) who have violated her right of defence. (Clark 1979)

A similar point is made by Jamieson (1990) and Varner (1998), both of whom point out a hypothetical case of our duty to shout a warning if a dislodged stone is likely to injure a hiker on a mountain. As Jamieson (1990) points out, what is at issue is our duty to provide assistance, not our responsibility to mitigate harm for which we are responsible.

Finally, acceptance that only anthropogenic suffering is an evil implies that the earth would be without evils if there were no humans alive on it. Even if all humans were strict vegans, there would be some anthropogenic animal suffering, due to the mechanics of ploughing, for example (Davis 2003). Therefore, acceptance that only anthropogenic suffering is an evil means that the only moral policy is to strive for the extinction of the human species, unless there is evidence for some overwhelming good derived from the presence of humans that can make up for all the evil that will be eliminated through their extinction. A small minority of environmentalists, such as the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement (<http://www.vhemt.org>), do advocate this, and some more moderate thinkers are sympathetic (Taylor 1981: VI), but neither of us has come across this as a rational position among animal liberationists. This suggests that animal liberationists either do not genuinely accept the benign nature of non-anthropogenic suffering, or have not thought through the logical consequences of their position.

To conclude, the most popular animal liberationist view about the suffering of wild animals is fundamentally incoherent. It is possible however that this view could be salvaged by appeal to various meta-ethical viewpoints. Some of these are discussed below.

***Response 3: Virtue Theory is Only Concerned
With Anthropogenic Suffering***

Virtue-theory ethics is a popular concept among those professing religious beliefs, although it is also making a comeback in secular normative ethics (Hursthouse 1999). Virtue ethicists argue that one acts morally not to effect any change in the world, nor because those who are acted upon have rights, but because an act is good in itself (Murdoch 1985), because it is good for one's soul, or because it is necessary for a person to "flourish and live well" as a human being (Hursthouse 1999).

Most virtue theorists then go on to say that a good act is, of course, one that does in fact serve to improve the world, so, in practice, the conduct they advocate is not markedly different from that advocated by utilitarians or rights theorists (e.g. Hursthouse 1999). However, it is possible for a virtue theorist not to follow this course, and to restrict his or her consideration to the inherent goodness of the action, without reference to consequences. On this basis, one may argue that avoiding harm to animals is virtuous, regardless of whether such actions reduce the amount of suffering in the world.

The difficulty with such a narrow understanding of virtue theory is that it tends to preclude activism: if the only thing that matters is the moral quality of the action itself, there is no point striving to improve the world. This would mean that, although one should oneself avoid causing harm to animals, there would be no need to encourage others to do likewise, or to campaign for legal and social changes to reduce harm to animals. If, on the other hand, one were to argue for the inherent virtuousness of activism, there is no logical reason why the same argument would not also suggest the virtuousness of reducing the suffering of wild animals.

Some virtue theorists expand the concept of virtue to include a consideration of the "souls" of others. George Bernard Shaw (1913), for example, argued for the discontinuation of vivisection because of its effect on others, particularly medical students. Those who hold views similar to Shaw's would be likely to campaign against animal abuses caused by humans, but could perhaps have no need for concern with non-anthropogenic suffering. However,

this is disputable; does not turning a blind eye to suffering harm one's "soul"?

Virtue theory tends to be associated with worldviews, such as some forms of Christianity,⁴ that reject the possibility of ameliorating the conditions of worldly life. The creed that is most thoroughgoing in this rejection is Theravada Buddhism, and it is therefore worth considering its position with respect to the treatment of animals. The Theravadin canonical scriptures repeatedly forbid the killing of animals (*Dhammapada*: 129-131, 225, 246, 405, *Majjhima Nikaya*: 27:13, 41:8-12, 51:9, 14, 54:4, 6, 114:5, 135:5-8), but do not advocate activism, and, on the contrary, insist that flesh-eating is morally acceptable, as long as one did not kill the animal oneself and did not order it to be killed (*Mahavagga*: 6:2, 31, *Amagandha Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya*: 55:5). This position seems odd at first glance, but makes sense when one considers that Theravada Buddhism does not aim to reduce the amount of killing that occurs on earth (which is assumed to be impossible), but seeks to improve the individual's moral status so as to enable him or her to escape from the cycle of rebirth.

Response 4: Contract Theory Excludes Concern for Wild Animals

If one holds a contractual view of ethics, one may argue that the social contract need not be verbal, and that domestic animals are tacit signatories. Lund et al. (2004) advocate this idea for organic farms. However, they include slaughter as part of the contract, which would not be acceptable for thorough-going liberationists. Apart from the objection to killing, our relationship with animals has few similarities with the Hobbesian ideal of free and equal individuals consenting to an arrangement of mutual benefit. Animals have no choice on whether to opt out of the contractual arrangement (with the possible exception of domestic cats), and do not start from a position of equality. The use of contract theory

⁴ For example, Feldman and Moseley (2003) state that "it is more important for the individual in the charismatic tradition to conform his or her soul to the demands of God than to conform the world to a notion of justice espoused by the mainstream 'helping' traditions".

as a model for animal relationships is therefore questionable (Palmer 1997). If contract theory is to be accepted by liberationists, domestic animals should at least be guaranteed goods such as protection from slaughter (*qua* Thomas Hobbes), liberty (*qua* Jean-Jacques Rousseau), and a degree of welfare (*qua* later contractualist thinkers).

A contractual position would or could exclude concern for wild animals. However, if so, it would also exclude objection to hunting, which would place it outside the bounds of animal liberationism as commonly understood. Interestingly, however, Richard Sorabji points out that debate about the treatment of animals in late-classical antiquity was concerned far more with domestic than with wild ones: "The consideration of relationships has the unexpected consequence that it puts more onus on the farmer who knows his animals than on the huntsman who cannot know his quarry." (Sorabji 1993: 214) As another example, killing and eating domestic animals was generally prohibited in pre-1850s Japan, yet hunting was widely accepted. The prohibition on killing domestic animals was based on Emperor Tenmu's edict in 676, which strictly forbade the eating of cattle, horses, dogs and domestic fowl (all the domestic animals of which there were significant numbers in Japan at that time), but permitted the hunting of most wild animals (Toneri and Yasumaro 720: 29:9-10).⁵

Stephen Clark, one of the very few animal liberationist thinkers to accord serious attention to non-anthropogenic animal suffering, presents a more sophisticated version of contract theory, based on the political philosophy of Robert Nozick, and this allows for the prohibition of hunting:

Wild animals, to which condition those animals whom we cannot employ without injustice should be allowed to return, have rights not to be mistreated, but have no necessary call on our resources . . . In short, wild things are like Nozick's independents, who have hired

⁵ This and later edicts established closed seasons, and prohibited particularly cruel hunting methods. However, the only hunting that was outlawed was that of monkeys (Japanese macaques), and these were probably protected because of their physical and cognitive similarities to humans. In Japan the similarity between humans and other primates has been exaggerated as often as it has been denied in Christendom; one eighteenth-century animal expert went so far as to claim that monkeys obey Shinto laws of ritual purity (Terashima 1712: bk. 40, p. 142).

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no protection agency: "The dominant protection agency's domain does *not* extend to quarrels of non-clients among themselves". (Clark 1979)

This is not the place to critique Nozick's political theories, but we find them unconvincing, especially with respect to animals. If, like Clark, one views humanity as the Caesar, that is, a ruler who, although powerful, does not necessarily aspire to universal dominion, division of non-subjects into tributary and independent warriors is appropriate. If, on the other hand, humanity is the Caliph, with a mission to rule, the entire non-subject world is the *Dar al-Harb*, awaiting subjection by military or diplomatic means. It is not obvious that the former model should be chosen rather than the latter.

In any case, Clark is not consistent in his Nozickianism, and falls back, four paragraphs later, on an undefended Singer- and Regan-like assertion that humans should simply avoid interference in the natural world: "Our clients we should protect, and sometimes even non-clients, but for the most part we should leave well alone. We have done enough remaking." (1979)

Response 5: Ethics of Care is Only Concerned with Anthropogenic Suffering

The care approach to ethics is often traced back to the philosophy of David Hume, who considered that sentiment is as important as reason as a source of morals (1751). A moral act is therefore one that meets with general approbation and/or that makes one feel good. Midgley takes a primarily care view of the treatment of animals, maintaining that children and poets, in tune with their emotions, have a natural empathy with animals (1984: 113-121). Similarly the views expressed by ecofeminists and environmental postmodernists, such as Josephine Donovan (1990) and Linda Vance (1995), are also probably best seen as care based:

Having demonstrated some of the shortcomings of other theories—"bad theories—if you insist—I should now offer you a good one, the theory that will solve our problems and allow us to claim victory. Sorry. At the risk of seeming disingenuous, I will tell you instead that I am an ecofeminist, and that in the feminist tradition,

we eschew the creation of “grand theories”, metanarratives to govern all actors in all situations at all times. (Vance 1995: 174-175)⁶

Taking a care view, one may see the anthropogenic suffering of animals as offensive, but not the non-anthropogenic suffering. This is certainly our personal feeling as modern Western biologists: we are horrified by the flesh industry in a way that we are not by the sight of a stoat taking a rabbit. However, the fundamental difficulty with this position, as with all emotivist approaches to ethics, is that it provides no resources for responding to those who have different gut-feelings.

For example, many people apparently have no innate hostility to animal slaughter and flesh-eating. On the other hand, horror at the sufferings of wild animals is a major component of Buddhist thought. Brian Luke argues eloquently against minimising the importance of emotion in the struggle for animal liberation (1995), but nothing he says disproves this central point.

Response 6: Reducing Non-anthropogenic Suffering by “Playing God”

Unlike the first five responses, giving reasons why liberationists should be concerned only with anthropogenic suffering, this response argues the case for directly intervening in an attempt to reduce suffering of wild animals.

One form of intervention is to maintain that all animals should be exterminated as a mercy killing. One author with some liberationist sympathies who is open to this idea is Jeff McMahon (2002), who considers the possibility of mercy killing because of what he sees as an asymmetry between the capacity of animals for suffering and for pleasure. While he does not come to any firm conclusions, the basic tenet of his thesis appears to be that euthanasia of animals who are not actually suffering can be ruled out because the present good experienced by them overrules any prospect of future suffering.

⁶ Vance’s opinions are more subtle than suggested here, and cannot be readily summarized.

We do not know whether any thorough-going animal liberationist supports painless extermination of animals, although an activist once privately admitted to us that the existence of animals, either wild or domestic, is irrelevant, and all that matters is that those animals that do exist are not ill-treated by humans. In addition, some strains of Buddhism are sympathetic to the plight of individual animals but welcome the extinction of species (Schmithausen 1991: 16-17). For example, several of the Mahayana sutras that describe paradise stress that it contains no animals, and that the “birds” placed there for human pleasure are automata, or perhaps hallucinations (*Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha*: ch. 6, *Larger Sukhavati-vyuha*: ch. 18, 40).

Secondly, one could maintain that although the existence of animals is a good thing, all animals should be domesticated, or at least kept in humanely run zoos and safari parks. This is an unusual position, as most animal liberationists are opposed to zoos, but Stephen Webb, Chairman of the International Christian Vegetarian Association, tends towards this view. He expresses satisfaction about the fact that the areas of wilderness in the world are decreasing, is opposed to all attempts to conserve or reintroduce carnivores, rejoices that “it’s the destiny of all animals to end up as pets”, and is strongly in favour of “well-run zoos”, where animals “can live longer, healthier lives without having to kill or be killed” (Webb 1998, Sheahen 2003).

Thirdly, one could maintain that all carnivores and parasites should be exterminated. Singer (1991) briefly considers this option, but dismisses it almost without discussion, on the ground that it would result in overpopulation, and thus lead to more suffering than it would prevent. However, it is far from clear whether this is the case. Firstly, under conditions of overpopulation many herbivores suffer spontaneous abortion, which would appear to be less painful than predation. Furthermore, even if intervention would cause more harm than good at present, there is no reason why this situation could not change with technological progress. Contraception-based population-control programmes have already been undertaken with deer in the USA (Cohn 2001), and are being considered for the control of possums in New Zealand (Cowan 2000, “GM carrots” 2001).

The above position leads to the possibility (which is not yet fully technologically feasible) of human micromanagement of the

biosphere. One surprisingly uncelebrated thinker who is unabashed by the possibility of human “divinity” is David Pearce (1998). He is primarily concerned with engineered human immortality, and with the use of sophisticated psychoactive drugs and brain technologies to maximise human pleasure. However, he also predicts that there will be massive progress in genetic technology over the next few decades, making feasible the nanotechnological reconstruction of the biosphere at the genetic level. Herbivores will be “eugenically enhanced”, “treated with long-acting depot contraceptives to stop uncontrolled breeding”, and genetically engineered to ensure constant bliss. Carnivores, on the other hand, will be eliminated. It will thus be feasible to eliminate suffering from the biosphere (Pearce 1998: 1:9-10).

Pearce’s position appears to be fully consistent with the animal liberationist position that one should aim to reduce suffering, and he carries this belief to its logical conclusion. It is difficult to argue against Pearce purely on the basis of either utilitarian or rights-based animal (or human) liberationism. Animal liberationists often dismiss this type of approach, without analysis, as “playing God”. We too are sure that we are not Pearce’s only readers to recoil from his putative utopia of happy, drug-dazed, immortal, human zombies, and happy, semi-domesticated animals.

Response 7: Acknowledging the Intrinsic Value of Animals Can Defend Non-anthropogenic Suffering

Some ethical theorists argue that certain entities are intrinsically valuable, quite apart from the rights or interests of these entities. For religious thinkers such entities have a non-instrumental value in the eyes of God. Secular thinkers argue for the intrinsic, non-instrumental value of certain things even in the absence of a human or divine valuer (see some accounts of this in O’Neill 1992).

Such theories of intrinsic value have been expressed by two disparate groups of thinkers, one of which accords value to human life, and the other of which accords value to components of the environment.

Most theorists of the intrinsic value of human life are conservative Christians, particularly Catholics (John Paul 1995). These

thinkers argue that the value of a human life overrides even the rights or interests of the liver of that life, and they therefore tend to oppose suicide and euthanasia.⁷

Ecocentric thinkers, on the other hand, argue that entities such as ecosystems, species, landscape features and biodiversity have an intrinsic value beyond their instrumental utility.⁸ The ecocentric school of thought derives from a famous quotation from Aldo Leopold, in the 1940s: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” (1948: 262) Ecocentric thought has since been developed more rigorously by thinkers such as Holmes Rolston (1994).

In addition to the above two schools, one Tory-traditionalist thinker, Roger Scruton, accords intrinsic value to customs and human artefacts. He terms acknowledgment of intrinsic value “piety” or “*pietas*” (1996), and defines it as follows: “The disposition to acknowledge the sacredness and untouchability of things, places, people and customs . . . because you have no right to encroach upon them, and because they are intrinsically worthy of respect” (2000: 183-184).

Most human-life value-theorists, in the tradition of Paul of Tarsus and Thomas Aquinas, dismiss the possibility of animal lives having intrinsic value, although C.S. Lewis does toy with the possibility when he criticises people whose kindness to animals leads them to kill them when in pain (1940: ch. 3). Similarly, most ecocentric thinkers are concerned exclusively with species rather than individuals, and Leopold was an enthusiastic “sport” hunter.⁹

Scruton is emphatically not an animal liberationist, although he is opposed to factory farming (2000: 101-103). However, there is no obvious reason why animal lives should not be intrinsically valuable.

⁷ An intrinsic-value theorist could defend suicide and euthanasia, on the ground that lives lose value when extremely painful, unconscious, or existentially meaningless. However, this position has rarely been defended, at least in the West, perhaps because it would in practice be indistinguishable from a rights-based position.

⁸ As these entities cannot make choices, their having intrinsic value has no practical difference from their having rights.

⁹ One exception is J. Baird Callicott (1990), who argues that our duties to the wider biotic community supplements, rather than replaces, our duty to both humans and animals.

The intrinsic value of individual animal lives would not rule out the elimination of predators; by analogy, acknowledging the intrinsic value of human lives rules out neither the execution or imprisonment of murderers and rapists, nor the legitimacy of just war. Therefore, *pietas* with respect to individual animal lives does not resolve the central problem of non-anthropogenic suffering, and leaves open the various playing-God options discussed above.

Nevertheless, it appears to be on *pietas* that our repugnance for Pearce's vision rests. This is not the place for detailed criticism of his proposals with respect to humans,¹⁰ but what he advocates could be seen as a sort of living euthanasia, eliminating the value of authentic life. With respect to animals, our repugnance is based on *pietas* for wildness and naturalness. Scruton maintains a position of this type in his hostility to factory farming:

There is the further and deeper question, prompted by both piety [*pietas*] and natural sympathy, as to whether it is right to keep animals, however little they suffer, in conditions so unnatural and destructive of the appetite for life . . . Those who decide this question merely by utilitarian calculation have no real understanding of what it means . . . Someone who was indifferent to the sight of pigs in batteries, who did not feel some instinctive need to pull down these walls and barriers and let in light and air, would have lost sight of what it is to be a living animal. His sense of the value of his own life would be to that extent impoverished by his indifference to the sight of life reduced to a stream of sensations. (2000: 101-102)

Therefore, the most common animal liberationist position, that most killing and exploitation of animals by humans is wrong, but wild animals should be left alone, can be defended on the basis of *pietas* for both individual lives and the wildness or non-artificiality of animal life, species, ecosystems and biodiversity in general. As *pietas* links environmentalism and animal liberationism into a single perspective, it suggests that those animal liberationists who are hostile to environmentalism should re-think their position in this respect (and *vice versa*).

¹⁰ One objection to Pearce's views with respect to humans is that one's life is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, such as a favourable afterlife, spiritual enlightenment, virtue, or art. This is closely connected with belief in its intrinsic value. This objection can be extended to cover at least some other species, especially if one believes in reincarnation.

However, the intrinsic-value-based position is not unproblematic, as it is difficult to define any objective way of identifying *pietas*-warranting entities. For example, if one has *pietas* for species, may it not also be appropriate for domestic breeds? One may go further: on what grounds do we rule out *pietas* for re-seeded pastures, fodder crops, or the corrugated-iron architecture of intensive pig production units?

These difficulties are particularly evident when one encounters a thinker who accords intrinsic value very differently from oneself. For example, in social terms, Scruton, a right-wing Tory, accords intrinsic value to exactly the sort of hierarchic and oppressive relations that we would oppose (*pietas* for tradition may well be appropriate, but the tradition of resistance is at least as authentic as that of deference).

Response 8: Reliance on Supernatural Intervention to Prevent Non-anthropogenic Suffering

With respect to animals, two themes recur through various religious traditions. The first is that wild animals, including carnivores, become tame and non-violent in the presence of human moral perfection. The second is that in the ideal state of the world (whether past, future, or outside time) all species of animals are present, yet with neither suffering nor predation. It is easy to mock these themes as indicating a wish for “Disneyland” (Scruton, 2000: 130), as represented by cartoons in which birds perch on Snow White, and forest herbivores and carnivores dance together around Johnny Appleseed, but we are open to the possibility that it is only in fantasy that a disenchanted, capitalist culture can acknowledge deep truths.

One example of the first theme is Pythagoras, often seen as the first Greek advocate of vegetarianism, who is said to have persuaded a bear not to be violent, and then to have fed him barley and acorns (Spencer 1995: 47). Other examples are the numerous Christian saints who are said to have befriended large wild carnivores and persuaded them to be non-violent, such as Philip and the leopard (*Acts of Philip*: ch. 8), Jerome and the lion (Regan 1988) and Francis and the wolf (Matz 2000). Also, the Cullavagga, in the Theravada Buddhist canon, states that monks

will not be bitten by snakes if they suffuse the tribes of snakes with kindness.

In Hinduism, the above ideas are given a fuller doctrinal definition, and are closer to the heart of the religion. For example, Patanjali, in the most celebrated yogic text, presented the tameness of animals in the presence of sanctity as a universal rule “As soon as he [the yogi] is grounded in abstinence from injury, his presence begets a suspension of enmity”. (2:35)

Patanjali’s commentators expanded this: “This occurs on the part of all living creatures”. (Vedavyasa: 2:35) “Even enemies whose hostility is everlasting, like horse and buffalo, mouse and cat, snake and mongoose, in the presence of the exalted who is grounded in abstinence from injury, conform themselves to his mind-stuff and renounce altogether their hostility”. (Vacaspaticra: 2:35)

To turn to the second theme, that in the ideal state there are carnivore species but no carnivory, some Jewish (e.g. Schwartz 2001) and Christian (e.g. Linzey 1995) animal liberationists emphasise the Biblical verses suggesting that humans and all animals were originally herbivorous:

God also said: “I give you all plants that bear seed everywhere on earth, and every tree bearing fruit which yields seed: they shall be yours for food. All green plants I give for food to the wild animals, to all the birds of heaven, and to all reptiles on earth, every living creature”. (*Genesis* 1:29-30, see also 2:16, 3:2, 18, 9:3)

Judaeo-Christian animal liberationists also point out that the Bible suggests that the biosphere will ultimately return to this state:

Then the wolf will lie down with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion will grow up together. The lion will eat straw like cattle; the infant will play over the hole of the cobra, and the young child dance over the viper’s nest. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. (*Isaiah* 11:2-9)

Then I will make a covenant on behalf of Israel with the wild beasts, the birds of the air, and the things that creep on the earth . . . so that all living creatures may lie down without fear. (*Hosea* 2:18)

Plato also understood the golden age as a state in which humans and animals were able to talk to each other (*Statesman*: 272) and

there was no natural violence: “There were demigods, who were the shepherds of the various herds and species of animals . . . neither was there any violence, or devouring of one another” (*Statesman*: 271, *Laws*, 6:782). Empedocles had earlier described the golden age as follows “For all things were tame and gentle to man, both beasts and birds, and friendly feelings were kindled everywhere”. (fragment 130) In addition, the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the most important *purana* in Vaishnava Hinduism, gives the following description of Krishna’s forest-paradise, Vrindavana: “Vrindavana is the transcendental abode of the Lord, where there is no hunger, anger or thirst. Though naturally inimical, both human beings and fierce animals live there together in transcendental friendship.” (10:13:60) Vaishnavists derive from this the teaching that devotion to Krishna enables people to gradually create Vrindavana in the modern world:

In Vrindavana the forest animals are as good as demigods, for they have no envy. Even in this material world, in the forest the animals live together, and when they go to drink water they do not attack anyone. Envy develops because of sense gratification, but in Vrindavana there is no sense gratification, for the only aim is Krishna’s satisfaction. Even in this material world, the animals in Vrindavana are not envious of the sadhus who live there. The sadhus keep cows and supply milk to the tigers, saying, “Come here and take a little milk”. Thus envy and malice are unknown in Vrindavana . . . Whether a *gosvami* or a tiger or other ferocious animal, everyone’s business is the same: to please Krishna. Even the tigers are devotees . . . In Vrindavana everyone is happy. The calf is happy, the cat is happy, the dog is happy, the man is happy: everyone . . . One may sometimes think that the monkeys in Vrindavana are envious, because they cause mischief and steal food, but in Vrindavana we find that the monkeys are allowed to take butter, which Krishna Himself distributes. Krishna personally demonstrates that everyone has the right to live. This is Vrindavana life. Why should I live and you die? No. That is material life. The inhabitants of Vrindavana think, “Whatever is given by Krishna, let us divide it as *prasada* and eat”. This mentality cannot appear all of a sudden, but it will gradually develop with Krishna consciousness. (Prabhupada 1982: 10:13:60)

Therefore, if an animal liberationist has the relevant metaphysical belief, it is possible for him or her to argue that, while we should try to preserve wild areas, the aim is not to create places where the suffering is “beyond all decent contemplation”, but areas that

await the benevolent influence of saints. There are difficulties with attempts to base this position on the Bible,¹¹ but these are less marked in Greek and Indian thought, and beliefs of this type are also more central in Hinduism than in other traditions.

Final discussion

The most popular animal liberationist position, that humans need have no concern about non-anthropogenic suffering (response 2), makes no sense. The view that anthropogenic suffering is worse than non-anthropogenic suffering (response 1), while possibly true, does not eliminate the problem entirely. Responses based on virtue theory (response 3) contract theory (response 4) and care ethics (response 5) have implications that apply equally to anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic suffering.

Among pure animal liberationist responses, the most consistent response open to materialists is that humans should effectively play God with the biosphere (response 6). However, this position is anathema to environmentalists and conservationists, and in our countries there is a great deal of overlap between the environmentalist and animal liberationist movements. In the USA, on the other hand, there is much hostility between animal liberation and environmentalism, and the environmentalist objection to the playing-God position is perhaps less relevant there.

Pietas, or acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of individual animal lives, the non-artificiality of animal life, and environmental entities, such as species, ecosystems, and biodiversity (response 7), provides a sounder basis for animal liberationism than responses 1 to 5. It also offers the great advantage of linking environmentalism and animal liberationism in a single perspective. However, acknowledgement of intrinsic value is not unproblematic.

Reliance on supernatural intervention (response 8) requires metaphysical beliefs that will strike many readers as groundless or bizarre. It will also be unacceptable to people who object to other

¹¹ Most of our objections to basing optimistic animal liberationism on the Bible are due to the bloodthirsty nature of the Old Testament, and the lack of any advocacy of compassion towards animals in the New Testament. However, we do not wish to reject categorically the validity of optimistic Christian and/or Jewish animal liberationism.

aspects of the respective religions (although we are uncertain whether religious beliefs have to be treated as package deals).

Perhaps the ideal position, if one can suspend disbelief, is a combination of responses 7 and 8. These are readily compatible, as, although *pietas* does not require religious belief, religion does seem to provide its strongest basis, as it identifies a real valuer: the deity. For example, belief in the intrinsic value of individual lives is most commonly associated with theism. There are also examples of polytheistic *pietas*, such as the strict protection of sacred woods, whether dedicated to Apollo in ancient Greece, or around Shinto shrines in modern Japan (Ueda and Ueda 2001).

The combination enables one to have *pietas* for carnivore species and their habitats. At the same time, it allows us to acknowledge that the habit of carnivory is an unfortunate result of the current paucity of saints (in Patanjalian terms), or of the Fall (in Judaeo-Christian terms). It is also possible to combine this position with an ecofeminist or Kropotkinist view of the relative benignity of the lives of wild animals (response 1).

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