# The Rights of Animals and the Demands of Nature

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two central themes of the work of Alan Holland: the relations between the natural and the normative and how our duties regarding animals cohere with our obligations to respect nature. I explicate and defend an anti-speciesist argument that entails strong moral demands on how we should live and what we should eat. I conclude by discussing the implications of anti-speciesism for rewilding and reintroduction programmes.

KEYWORDS

Rights, animals, nature, speciesism, rewilding

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## INTRODUCTION

Alan Holland's work is characterised by depth and richness, while often provoked by practical problems or disputes. Rather than writing tracts on 'environmental pragmatism' or the importance of unifying theory and practice, Holland forces us to attend to fundamental philosophical questions while addressing actual problems of environmental policy. Two central themes of Holland's work are the relations between the natural and the normative, and how our duties regarding animals cohere with our obligations to respect nature. This essay can be thought of as my side of a dialogue with Holland that focuses on these themes.

I begin by characterising speciesism, and claim that although many people are committed to rejecting it, they nevertheless fail to endorse what would appear to be the obvious consequences of its rejection. I associate this failure with historically-based views about the relations between nature, humans and other animals that still have considerable sway. I claim that while a thorough-going anti-speciesism respects the adage that 'humans are part of nature', these evasions do not. I conclude by discussing how a consistent anti-speciesist would address the question of 'rewilding' nature.

## SPECIESISM AND THE RIGHTS OF ANIMALS

Many people today would endorse the claim that animals have rights. This is suggested by informal polls, popular parlance and even some recent legislation. In jurisdictions such as Boulder, Colorado and Berkeley, California, people no longer own pets; instead, they serve as guardians for their companion animals. In the mid-1990s the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago asked a representative sample of the American population whether they agreed with the following statement: 'Animals should have the same moral rights that human beings do'. About 35 per cent in one survey, and 39 per cent in another, agreed or agreed strongly with this statement.[1]

This result may actually understate popular sentiment on behalf of animals, since not all vegetarians and anti-vivisectionists believe that animals have rights. Nor does everyone who believes that animals have rights believe that they have the same rights as humans. I myself do not believe that all humans and all animals have all the same moral rights. Humans may have the right to practice religion and eagles may have the right to spread their wings and fly, but humans do not have the right to fly nor do eagles have the right to practice religion. If there are any rights, they are tied to capacities. Only creatures who can practice religion have rights to practice religion and only creatures who can fly have rights to fly. Of course, not every capacity is associated with a right. Humans have the capacity to murder but no right to do so.

There are many subtleties about rights, as the preceding discussion begins to bring out. There are also important nuances of language involved in the discussion of animal rights. In one sense, everyone who believes in human rights believes in animal rights since humans are animals. It is strange and revealing that we class chimpanzees and mosquitoes together as animals and exclude ourselves from this class. Plato thought that it was no more sensible to divide living creatures into humans and animals than cranes and non-cranes.[2] Still, we know perfectly well what people are talking about when they say that they are for animal rights. They mean that there are moral reasons for treating animals a lot better than we do. What is clear from scientific surveys and casual conversations is that animal rights, once the cause of a few bohemian intellectuals and sentimentalists, is now championed by a broad cross-section of the American people, from the heir to the Baskin-Robbins ice cream fortune to a former speechwriter for the first President Bush.

To a great extent these changes have been engendered by a searching philosophical critique of our treatment of non-human animals. Since the 1975 publication of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, a powerful case has been made for changing our behaviour with respect to animals. The case is all the more compelling because it has been mounted from a broad range of moral perspectives. Rights theorists, Kantians and Utilitarians have all argued that many non-human animals have rights, that they should be respected as ends in themselves, or that the interests of humans and non-humans should be given equal consideration.

What these views have in common is the rejection of speciesism. This term, 'speciesism', was coined by the British psychologist Richard Ryder in 1970 and popularised by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation*. Singer defines 'speciesism' as 'a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species'.[3] Speciesism, like sexism and racism, is a prejudice involving a preference for one's own kind, based on a shared characteristic that in itself has no moral relevance.[4]

The rejection of speciesism in the writings of animal liberationist philosophers has two important features. First, what is of primary moral relevance is individuals and the properties they instantiate, not the fact that they may be members of various collectives or kinds. [5] Thus, for the purposes of morality, properties such as being a member of the Lions Club or a citizen of the United States are not in themselves of central moral relevance. Second, the individual characteristics that are morally relevant are not properties such as species, race and gender, but rather characteristics such as sentience, the capacity for desire and self-consciousness. Although there are many properties that I do not share with my dog Grete, it is clear that there are some morally relevant properties that we do have in common. It is this sort of observation that animates the following remark by the eighteenth century English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham:

> The day *may* come when the rest of animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been witholden from them but by the hands of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum* are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate.[6]

If we were to reduce the principal insight of anti-speciesism to a slogan it would be this: biological facts alone do not determine moral status; to suppose otherwise is to commit the same fallacy as racists and sexists. It is wrong to kick me not because I'm white, male and human, but because it hurts.[7]

Alan Holland claims to reject anti-speciesism, endorsing instead what he calls 'moderate speciesism'.[8] Holland believes 'that humans are morally entitled to prefer the interests of fellow humans over the equivalent interests of other animals'.[9] Whether this actually commits him to the rejection of anti-speciesism depends on how one understands what exactly he is claiming.

In at least two kinds of cases an anti-speciesist can agree with Holland. A rat and a human may have equivalent interests in that these interests play the same functional role in each creature's overall structure of interests, yet it may be the case that satisfying the interest of the human is of greater moral urgency than satisfying the interest of the rat. For example, humans and rats may have equivalent interests in continued life, but satisfying the interest of a normal human may be of greater moral urgency than satisfying the interest of a normal rat. This may be because a normal human life is more valuable than a normal rat life – not because it is a human life, but because of the quality of the life. In the second kind of case the anti-speciesist understands 'equivalent' as implying that satisfying the interests in question is of equal moral value, but even in this case Holland and the anti-speciesist may be in agreement. For both may agree that If there is no decisive moral reason to prefer one creature to another, then species solidarity is a permissible ground for breaking the tie.

What is Holland's view? He believes that human life is more valuable than non-human life, but that this is a contingent fact that obtains in virtue of humans being the kind of creatures that they are. An anti-speciesist could again agree. What is speciesist is the claim that some lives are of superior moral value because they are human. But it is not speciesist to hold that some lives are of superior moral value, and as a matter of fact they are human. Perhaps lives are like minerals in this respect. Valuable minerals may characteristically be found in mountains, but it is not in virtue of being in mountains that they are valuable. Here is what I am claiming. Holland's 'moderate speciesism' may be untenable and he may draw unwarranted implications from his own principles, but it is far from clear that it constitutes a principled rejection of anti-speciesism.

The anti-speciesist argument is compelling and many people appear to accept it, including perhaps the more than one-third of the American population

that believes that animals have the same rights as humans, and perhaps even Holland. Yet, clearly, there is a yawning chasm between accepting anti-speciesism in principle and putting it into practice. Undoubtedly, many of those who endorse animal rights eat meat, wear fur, go to zoos, and so on. Admittedly, it is not easy to live a consistently anti-speciesist life. As Singer notes in *Animal Liberation*, everything else being equal, someone who rejects speciesism should be morally indifferent between a human and a dog who are at the same level of consciousness. Yet many people, even vegetarians, are not indifferent; and this failure to be indifferent is not generally regarded as a moral failing. Many people who appear to accept the anti-speciesist argument, bob and weave in their attempts to evade its consequences rather than confessing to weakness of will when it comes to putting it into practice. What explains this behaviour?

## PREDATION AND EATING MEAT

A recent book by Michael Pollan helps to shed light on this question.[10] Pollan acknowledges the power of the anti-speciesist arguments, but seeks to evade the sweeping conclusion that vegetarianism is morally required. In the end he concludes that it is permissible to eat animals who are raised humanely and slaughtered painlessly, but that this is the only meat that a morally conscientious person should eat.

This conclusion is not in any way outlandish or unreasonable. Indeed, it is not substantially different from Singer's own conclusion. What is surprising is that Pollan seems to think that he has blunted the force of the animal liberationist argument, and he leaves the impression that quite a lot of meat-eating by quite a lot of Americans is justified. But this is not the case.

It is extremely difficult to obtain a reliable estimate of what percentage of the meat produced in America is the flesh of animals who have led happy lives and been painlessly slaughtered. Experts with whom I have discussed this question say, that even when these terms are understood generously, the number is certainly much less than 1 per cent. Thus, not much meat-eating in America could pass Pollan's test because not much meat from humanely raised and slaughtered animals is available. Nor is there any reason for supposing that the fraction of humanely produced meat is increasing.

Meat production in America is becoming increasingly concentrated and intensive. It is becoming increasingly concentrated in that a few large companies are producing a growing fraction of meat consumed by Americans: the overwhelming majority is now produced by only four companies. It is becoming increasingly intensive in that more meat is being produced on less land, using fewer animals and cheaper inputs. According to the National Pork Producers Council, 80 of the 95 million hogs slaughtered each year in America are intensively reared in mass confinement systems. Pigs raised in this way never dig in the dirt, expe-

rience sunshine, or naturally socialise with other pigs. Their most significant interaction with humans occurs when they are eaten.[11] Pollan's romantic vision in which we respectfully eat animals who are humanely raised and slaughtered is exceedingly difficult to implement even by those strongly committed to this ideal, and it appears that it is becoming more difficult all the time.

Moreover, Pollan never really faces the implication at the heart of the anti-speciesist argument: If eating a cow who is raised humanely and slaughtered painlessly is morally permissible, then so is eating a human at the same level of consciousness who is also raised humanely and slaughtered painlessly. This conclusion, for many anti-speciesists, is grounds for rejecting virtually all of our carnivorous practices. Surely Pollan too would find this consequence thoroughly repugnant, but if this repugnance is to be taken as anything more than squeamishness or hypocrisy, then the anti-speciesist argument is going to have to be faced head-on. If we have moral scruples about eating one of our own, raised and slaughtered humanely, why should we not have such scruples about the cow or the pig?

The answer for many people, I think, is that while they are willing to accept in a general way that animals have rights, they see these rights as severely limited by the natural order in which animals are embedded. We may have duties to make the lives of animals a little easier, especially those who are under our direct control, but we very quickly run up against the demands of nature and it is foolish or absurd to go against them. Thus a *reductio ad absurdum* often invoked against animal liberationists claims that, given their principles, they should find predation morally troubling. Ritchie writing in 1916 was deploying this very argument when he asked rhetorically, 'Are we not to vindicate the rights of the persecuted prey of the stronger? Or is our declaration of the rights of every creeping thing to remain a mere hypocritical formula to gratify pug-loving sentimentalists?'[12] According to Pollan, 'predation is not a matter of morality or politics;' it is instead simply a fact about how nature works. [13] Animal liberationists, he says, 'betray a profound ignorance about the workings of nature'.[14] Some critics go even further and charge that, with their focus on preventing unnecessary suffering, animal liberationists espouse a 'world-denying' or 'life-loathing' philosophy'.[15]

In response, we should notice first that to say that something is a matter of moral concern is not immediately to condemn it or to commit oneself to its elimination. It is only to say that moral responses and evaluations are appropriate with respect to the phenomenon in question. The degree to which we should be concerned, and the plausibility of any particular view about whether the phenomenon in question should be promoted, discouraged, applauded or regretted does not immediately follow from identifying it as a matter of moral concern. Furthermore, a great deal of predation is in some way affected by human agency, either because we have structured the encounter or because the predator is under our direct or indirect control. In these cases moral evaluation

is clearly in order. Finally, I think that any sensitive person who watches films of a wildebeest being stalked, struck, weakened, then consumed alive by a pack of hyenas is bound to find moral emotions such as empathy and sympathy welling up, often in contradictory ways. For those who believe in an omnipotent and benevolent God, the experience of such suffering may be especially troubling.[16] For these reasons Pollan's categorical dismissal of predation from the domain of moral concern is too quick and facile. The fact that predation is at the center of the natural order is not in itself sufficient for removing it from the reach of the moral sentiments.

Still, the picture that many people have is that the world of morality and reciprocity is a human construction, and while animals are occasional guests and in some cases even honorary members of this human community, their real home is in a nature that is 'red in tooth and claw'. Going too far in imposing moral concepts on nature's creatures is a little like dressing up dogs and cats for a Victorian tea party. It is not only tasteless, but involves the worst sort of anthropomorphism. When seen in this way, it is not a long step to dismissing as fanatics those who want to sterilise, relocate, or simply co-exist with deer who eat ornamental shrubs or threaten to collide with SUVs. Nature has its own way of dealing with overpopulation and it does not involve contraceptives and tranquilliser darts. When people kill deer as a way of reducing populations, they act as nature's agents, and are more likely to be gentle and sensitive than nature herself. From here it is only another step to arrive at the ubiquitous view that by eating organic hamburgers or becoming the sort of 'vegetarians' who eat 'only' chicken and fish, we adequately discharge whatever duties we may have with respect to animals. Even Jeremy Bentham defended his carnivorous practices in this way, writing that '[t]he death they suffer in our hands commonly is, and always may be, a speedier, and by that means a less painful one, than that which would await them in the inevitable course of nature'.[17] Once the real place of animals is seen as in 'nature red in tooth and claw' rather than in societies of kindness and cooperation, then the rights of animals may come to be seen as functioning only to mitigate their natural miseries.

## THE GOODNESS OF HUMANS AND THE EVIL OF NATURE

There is little question that we see ourselves as exceptionally nice compared to the natural order. In his essay, 'Nature', the nineteenth century philosopher, John Stuart Mill, described what he called 'the odious scene of violence and tyranny which is exhibited by the rest of the animal kingdom, except insofar as tamed or disciplined by man'. He went on to say that 'a large proportion of all animals….pass their existence in tormenting and devouring other animals'.[18]

The idea that we are better than the brutes is even built into our language. Terms such as 'human' and 'humane' connote what is good, and there is almost

nothing worse than being 'inhuman'. On the other hand terms that refer to or connote animals, such as 'brute' or 'beast', suggest badness or evil. In her classic discussion of the workings of the concept of beastliness, the English philosopher Mary Midgley quotes the following newspaper headline: 'Animal mother jailed'.[19] Unsurprisingly the article was not about a cow or pig cruelly removed from her offspring, but a human mother who brutally beat her three children.

This contrast between the goodness of humans and the evil of nature is, of course, sometimes inverted. For example, the eighteenth century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the subsequent Romantic tradition glorified nature, and the echo can be heard in the voices of those who swim with the dolphins and view animals as spiritual teachers. While not glorifying nature in this way, various enlightenment thinkers, including John Locke and some of the founders of the American republic, viewed the deliverances of reason and the laws of nature as fundamentally the same. According to Locke, the law of nature is 'as intelligible and plain to a rational creature, and a studier of that law, as the positive laws of commonwealths; nay, possibly plainer; as much as reason is easier to be understood, than the fancies and intricate contrivances of men'. [20] Indeed, many environmental philosophers positively valence nature. Alan Holland declares that 'every last drop' of nature is good, Alan Carlson finds all of 'pristine' nature to be of positive aesthetic value, and Holmes Rolston III finds all kinds of values everywhere in nature.[21]

It should be clear from this abbreviated discussion that, in our thought and action, the concept of nature is an extremely elastic notion, one on to which we project many of our deepest longings and fantasies.[22] While the human responses to nature verge on the endlessly diverse and apparently unfathomable, at least some of the facts about nature are relatively straightforward.

One of them is this: the infliction of pain, death and gratuitous suffering occurs in many species, human and non-human. Many examples of humans behaving abominably, often directly under God's command, are found in the Bible. For example, in *Numbers*, Chapter 31, we are told that God ordered Moses and the children of Israel to make war on the Midianites. The war was successful, and after all the Midianite men were killed and their cities destroyed, the women and children were taken captive. This show of (relative) mercy angered Moses, and he ordered that all the women and boys be killed, but he told his soldiers to 'keep [the young girls] alive for yourselves'.[23] By comparison, the 'chimpanzee war' described by Jane Goodall, which horrified people all over the world, resulted in the deaths of about nine animals over a four year period.[24]

Just as the infliction of pain, death and gratuitous suffering occurs in many species, so does love, play, cooperation, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion. Humans are of course capable of these behaviours, but so are such animals as apes, monkeys, elephants, cetaceans, cats and canids. This has been well documented by such ethologists as Jane Goodall, Franz de Waal and Marc Bekoff.[25]

Humans and other animals are capable of a great range of behaviour, and often what observers report is tinged with their own expectations. However, none of this mitigates the basic claim of anti-speciesism: Individual animals of whatever species are morally equivalent, except insofar as they instantiate morally relevant properties that distinguish them from other individuals. One consequence of this is that, on the anti-speciesist view, both humans and nonhumans are part of nature in an obvious and direct way. We are all governed by the laws of nature, it is natural properties in virtue of which we are the objects of moral concern, and it is nature that gives us the moralities that we practice.[26]

Rather than accepting that humans are part of nature in this obvious and direct way, those who want to avoid the force of the anti-speciesist argument continually reinvent and relocate the boundary that separates humans from other animals. Thus the dualism between humans and nature that we have been discussing simply replaces the dualism between humans and animals, with animals being seen as part of nature. Just as the speciesist conceptualisation of animals is driven primarily by the desire to celebrate humans, so here the idea of the natural becomes a projection of all that humans think of themselves as having overcome or from which they are exempt. Yet, paradoxically, there is often an insistence that humans are part of nature, even while excepting them from its moral demands.[27]

On this understanding of the dictum that humans are part of nature, humans have permission to reduce deer populations by hunting, since in doing so they simply replace wolves as predators in the ecosystems of which deer are a part.[28] This way of understanding the dictum gives us license for 'managing' nature when it suits us, but carries no obligation to make ourselves subject to nature's vicissitudes. It is striking that people who advocate this approach to deer overpopulation do not endorse similar measures in response to suburban sprawl. Humans are part of nature when they act as nature's agents, but they are not part of nature in being subject to nature's demands. Not only does this dualism posit an unstable relation between humans and nature, but the singling out of humans among all other species as the centre of agency is vulnerable to what we might call the 'immaculate conception' objection.

For centuries it was theological and philosophical dogma that there is a profound difference in the psychological lives of humans and all other animals. In its starkest form, some philosophers and theologians believed that animals have no psychological lives at all – that they are mindless, organic automata. For example, the seventeenth century French philosopher, Malebranche, wrote regarding animals, 'they eat without pleasure, they cry without sorrow, they desire nothing, they fear nothing, they know nothing'.[29] Since animals are incapable of experiencing, there is no reason to be concerned when we treat them in ways that would cause pain to humans.

This view was never without its detractors, but in the face of the Darwinian revolution it began to collapse. Species arise from other species by means of

natural selection operating on traits. Because humans and their close relatives, the other great apes, have common ancestors, they share many physical traits.[30] To suppose that psychological traits are not among the traits they share seems contrary to experience, and is also to suppose that there was a rupture in evolutionary history. Even if 'evolutionary explosions' occur, as some suggest, they are not the norm, and there must be precursors even to these. In view of such considerations, it would appear that those who deny psychological continuity between humans and other animals are espousing the view that human psychology appears via immaculate conception. Such a view is difficult to maintain for anyone who wants to claim fidelity to a scientific worldview.

While this argument has been widely accepted for many traits, it is only beginning to be acknowledged that it also applies to those traits that are implicated in human agency.[31] Just as it is unbelievable (at least for a naturalist) to suppose that those psychological traits that make us objects of moral concern burst full-blown into existence devoid of parentage, so it seems implausible to suppose that those traits that make us moral agents emerge via immaculate conception. Indeed, research by such biologists and philosophers as Chrisopher Boehm, Franz de Waal, Elliot Sober and David Sloane Wilson is beginning to show how human morality might have evolved from precursor systems of social control.[32]

What I have been suggesting is that someone who attempts to dodge the full force of the anti-speciesist argument by supposing that animals are subject to the demands of nature in a way that humans are not, is embracing an unstable and implausible version of the dictum that humans are part of nature. The tension can be resolved either by submitting to the full force of the anti-speciesist argument, or by taking refuge in older, pre-Darwinian views about the relations between humans and nature.

One influential version of Christianity teaches that, as a result of the Fall, nature is evil; or, perhaps more precisely, that the evil we aspire to overcome is embodied in nature. God's nature was the Garden of Eden, a peaceable kingdom in which humans were not just vegetarian but vegan, and the lions laid down with the lambs. It was only after Adam's sin that nature became red in tooth and claw. Sinful nature is now ubiquitous, even occurring within us, as part of our own human nature. Indeed, according to St. Paul, the 'natural man' within us is the source of evil in our lives. On this view, in order for nature to have value, it must be redeemed and sanctified by God. The nature we experience, is unredeemed, fallen nature. [33]

Christian views of nature interacted in complex and interesting ways with Greek and Roman views, giving rise to what may broadly be called 'humanism'.[34] A major project of humanism from Aristotle to Chomsky is to identify those properties, principles, or capacities that distinguish humans from other

animals. It is in these distinguishing features that the importance and value of humanity consists. For example, many philosophers and linguists believe that the capacity for language is distinctly human, and is in some way the source of our importance. Those who think in a more biological way typically have a different view. Even if they were to grant the uniqueness claim, they would not attach the same value to it. Their inclination is to see language as one form of animal communication system that evolved in one particular species as a way of solving its own unique problems. Other species have evolved their own solutions to the problems that they face. No comparative value is attached to the mechanisms by which different species solve their different problems. For humanists, however, it is not only that language is unique to humans, but also that language in some way makes humans uniquely valuable.

Humanists come in different varieties. John Stuart Mill was a humanist who can reasonably be regarded as a proto-environmentalist. He advocated a stationary state economy in which the focus is on 'improving the Art of Living', and he also campaigned to save rare plants in rural England. [35] Yet, as we have seen, Mill viewed nature as a repository of evil, and saw the human project as directed towards its conquest. However, contrary to Christian writers such as Paul, Mill thought that the evil of nature was evidence against the existence of the Christian God. For no God who is both omnipotent and perfectly benevolent could create and continue to tolerate the house of horrors that is nature. Any hope for improvement resides in people, not in God or nature. It is up to us to nourish what he calls 'the good germs in one another',[36] since 'this artificially created or at least artificially perfected nature of the best and noblest human beings, is the only nature which it is ever commendable to follow'.[37] Whatever their differences, humanists would not see the slogan, 'humans are part of nature', as a rallying cry, but at best as a grudging admission of our weakness and failure.

Alternatively, one could take anti-speciesism seriously. As we have seen, anti-speciesists, like humanists, also have a consistent line regarding relations between humans and nature. Just as there is no species test for right-holding, so there is no species-test for being subject to the demands of nature. Whether it is interests, sentience, self-consciousness or simple existence that grounds rights, anti-speciesists are willing to endorse the consequences. This may result in an expansive view in which even plants have rights or a restrictive view in which only some humans have rights, but what is almost certainly not the case is that an anti-speciesist view will imply that all and only humans have rights. In what remains of this essay, I will briefly discuss how a consistent anti-speciesist might approach one of the many difficult practical problems with which we are faced.

## REWILDING NATURE

Humans have a curiously bimodal relationship to nature. On the one hand our behaviour and ways of life constitute a war against nature; on the other hand we pine for a lost world, and seek to reconstitute it. These attempts range from the creation of Disneyland-style theme parks to introducing species to areas from which they have been purged. We can distinguish various attempts to reconstitute nature by manipulating animals, in the following way.

What are called 'reintroduction' programmes (but better called 'introduction' programmes), take wild animals from one region and introduce them to another region that typically was part of the historical range of their species. For example, since 1999 a programme has been underway to capture wild lynx in Canada, and then release them in Southern Colorado in an attempt to create a sustainable population. Such programmes have high mortality rates and generally fail.[38] The success of this one, thus far, can charitably be described as 'mixed'. Half of the 218 lynx that have been released may be dead. Successful reproduction only began to occur in 2003 and in 2007 there was no documented reproduction at all.[39]

Other programmes, rather than relocating wild animals, aim at 'rewilding' animals who are no longer fully wild, either because they were once wild but have become dependent on people, or because they have always been domesticated, in which case such programmes are better thought of as 'wilding' rather than 'rewilding' programmes. An example of the first sort is the attempt to rewild Keiko, the cetacean star of the movie, *Free Willy*. Examples of the second sort are the 'dedomestication' programmes now underway in the Netherlands. In that country almost all wild animals have been extirpated, and there is now a programme to release domestic animals in several relatively large enclosed areas and to manage them in ways that will result in their dedomestication. This involves, for example, withholding veterinary care and nutrition when deleterious conditions arise due to natural conditions such as bad weather, bad luck, or overpopulation.[40]

In different ways all of these programmes are directed towards creating self-sustaining populations of wild animals in natural surroundings. What should a consistent anti-speciesist say about such efforts?

The most fundamental question about such programmes is why we want to engage in them in the first place. Dedomestication is directed towards rewilding animals, but in the Dutch case, barring radically unforeseen events, such rewilding will not occur, at least on timescales worth our contemplating. The idea must be that loosening human control of these animals is valuable, even if it does not culminate in rewilding them.

But why is this valuable? One thought might be that the less domesticated the animal, the higher the welfare it enjoys. But this is obviously false. Grete, my dog, clearly enjoys higher levels of welfare living with me than she would

if she were to be rewilded to whatever degree is possible, and what is true of Grete is true of many animals. A 'reintroduced' lynx may not enjoy a higher level of welfare than a caged lynx, and a caged lynx may not have a life worth living. But moreover, even if dedomesticated animals as a class would enjoy higher levels of welfare than domestic animals as a class, very few individuals will live in both states, and those who transition between them may have the most difficult lives of all.

Still, it may be morally acceptable to dedomesticate some animals, but there will be a serious moral cost in doing so. One way to bring this out is to imagine a case in which a human population is given the choice of accepting severe reductions in their welfare so that future generations may enjoy levels of welfare far higher than theirs. Although many people may say that this would be the morally correct choice, most of us do not act as if this were the case. For we continue to live in a way that threatens to severely compromise the welfare of future people, rather than sacrificing on their behalf. Moreover, in the case of nonhuman animals, this decision to sacrifice for the future is being made for them, rather than by them. This line of argument, that others must sacrifice so that we together can make a better world, is reminiscent of the idea that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. The lesson of twentieth century attempts to create utopias through intensive management is that while we can be sure that the eggs will be broken, the omelette often remains elusive.

Sometimes the rhetoric that surrounds these programmes suggests that there are ecological considerations that support them. However, in the collapsing natural world of today, even when biological diversity is maintained, ecological functions are usually lost. The case for preserving the wolf in most regions of North America, or introducing the lynx to Southern Colorado, does not rest on the ecological services these remnant or introduced populations can provide. If we think of these creatures as being like stamps, these programmes can at best be expected to produce stamp collections rather than functioning postal systems.

The failure of ecological and animal welfare considerations generally to support attempts at reconstituting nature by manipulating animals suggests that the case for such programmes rests primarily on human preferences. Many of us want at least some parks to have some significant relation to the natural world, however vestigal and degraded, just as many of us prefer 'naturalistic' zoo exhibits to the sight of bars and cages. However not all preferences are created equal. They may have greater or lesser moral urgency, depending on their content and how they are grounded. Joyce's desire to write *Finnegan's Wake* was sublime, and we should be grateful that it was satisfied. Hitler's desire to rule Europe was at best not worth satisfying and almost certainly just plain evil. What grounds human preferences for reintroducing or rewilding animals? I think there are two related, but distinct, grounds.

The first is a desire to return the world, at least in some respects and to some degree, to the way that it was at a better time. We don't have to think very long

or hard about this to see that the precise content of this desire is quite indeterminate. When exactly was the golden age in Earth's history? Indeed, how do we begin to answer this question? Even if we could answer these questions, others would remain open. To what extent should we seek to reconstitute the Earth as it was, knowing that an exact duplication is impossible or even undesirable? We want lions, but we don't want lions to threaten our children. We want birds and insects, but we don't want to do without the accoutrements of modern life whose by-products find their way into the environment and reduce their populations. It is hard to see the ground for this desire as anything more substantial than nostalgia. And while nostalgia may be a perfectly good reason to buy a turntable and throw away one's CD player, it doesn't seem to provide a very good reason for troubling the lives of humans and animals in the way that reintroduction and rewilding programmes require.

Another desire that may be in play is not to return to some earlier state of the world, but to make the world what it ought to be. What animates this desire is a commitment to natural teleology. Anti-environmentalists have suspected this all along: scratch a green and watch a pagan bleed (or what comes to the same thing, an Aristotelian). This impression of a commitment to natural teleology is reinforced when proponents of dedomestication talk about 'potential wildness'. The irony here is not that these views are indefensible (which they are, in my opinion), but that Charles Darwin, who many of us think of as a founding father of environmentalism, was their most important executioner. For it was Darwin who showed how the impression of purpose in the world can be produced by random processes.[41]

Does the failure of these arguments to be compelling mean that respectable grounds for reintroduction and rewilding programmes are not available? No. Human preferences have some weight, perhaps especially those that rest on aesthetic concerns, or a desire for variety, or even to experience some reminders of the past. What is important is to recognise that, in most cases, the motivation for such programmes centres on the satisfaction of human preferences rather than on concerns about animal welfare or the maintenance of ecological values. There may be cases in which rewilding would not compromise animal welfare (perhaps because it is already so compromised), and these will be cases in which such rewilding is likely to be morally unproblematic. However, most cases of rewilding or reintroducing are likely to involve conflicts between the satisfaction of human preferences and the welfare of nonhuman animals. How exactly to trade them off is a complicated moral question, no different in principle from the question of how to trade off human preferences against each other. My own view is that the human exploitation of other animals is generally so severe and unrelenting that a precautionary principle should be invoked: when the satisfaction of human preferences conflicts with the welfare of non-human animals and it is not clear how to calculate the trade-offs, we should give the non-human animals the benefit of the doubt. This consideration also supports

the idea that when rewilding and reintroduction programmes are implemented, whether rightly or wrongly, animal welfare considerations should be at the centre of concern. It is bad enough to implement an unjustifiable programme; the least we can do is demand that it be done in the least harmful way.

The moral acceptability of any particular case of rewilding or reintroduction will depend on the legitimate domain of human responsibility, the nature and basis of human preferences that bear on the case, and the impacts on the welfare of the animals who would be affected. I am distrustful of many such projects – not because I do not love wild nature but because I am suspicious of us and our motivations. Insofar as these projects are honestly directed towards enhancing wildness and restoring ecological function, then I am sympathetic to them. But all too often they are really directed towards what the biologist Marc Bekoff calls 'redecorating nature', and the animals are the furniture that are being rearranged.[42] The most effective way to promote wild nature is not by doing new things and undertaking new projects, it is simply to refrain from the murderous activities that are part of everyday life. Indeed, the most effective means by which animals return to their ancient homelands is often natural colonisation. Lynx are returning to their historical range in Washington, Minnesota, Montana and Maine without the help of humans. What they need from us is not radio collars or free transport from Canada to the United States, but protection of the old growth forests that they need to survive.

## CONCLUSIONS

What I have tried to show in this paper is that once one accepts the anti-speciesist argument, as many claim to do, it is very difficult to evade strong moral demands about what we should eat, how we should live, and what kind of world we should seek to create. I have also claimed that anti-speciesism provides a coherent understanding of what it means for humans to be part of nature.

Anti-speciesism is strenuous but it should not be thought of as unforgiving. We are weak creatures, living in a world in which innocent people are bombed, sometimes tortured, and often not provided with the means for a minimally decent life. In such circumstances we will often compromise and be compromised, working to bring about the least evil rather than the most good. Predictably, we will also fail to live up to our highest ideals, suffering from loss of nerve, shortages of wisdom and failures of energy. Still it matters that we keep our eye on what morality demands. Our failure to bring about the best is not grounds for condemnation or despair, but rejecting our duty because we know we will fulfil it only incompletely, is an unconscionable act of cynicism.

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## NOTES

[1] http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/ (accessed 27 February 2006). Popular sentiment on behalf of animals appears to be stronger in Europe, especially in the United Kingdom, than in the United States, but my focus in this essay is primarily on the United States.

[2] *Statesman* 263d

[3] Singer, 1990, p. 6.

[4] To say this, however, is only the beginning. For further discussion, see Pluhar, 1995 and Fjellstrom, 2002. See also Jamieson, 2008, ch. 5.

[5] This feature is emphasised by James Rachels, 1990.

[6] As quoted in Singer, 1990, p. 7

[7] Since concepts of sex, race, and species arise through the complex interplay of natural and social factors, there are complications lurking in the background. However, I do not believe that these complications affect the main point that I am urging. It is also worth noting that a distinction could be marked between anti-speciesism and non-speciesism, with the former implying a commitment to activism that the latter does not. In what follows I will ignore this distinction.

[8] Holland, 1985.

[9] Holland, 1985, p. 284.

[10] Pollan, 2006.

[11] This data is taken mainly from Scully (2002, p. 29), who in turn relies on industry sources.

[12] As quoted in Sagoff, 1995, pp. 168–169.

[13] Pollan, 2006, p. 322.

[14] Pollan, 2006, p. 320.

[15] J. Baird Callicott, 1995, p. 53. Tyler Cowen (2003) poses the most provocative challenge to animal liberationist thinking about predation.

[16] One Christian who struggled with this issue quite explicitly was C.S. Lewis in his *The Problem of Pain* (2001, originally published in 1940).

[17] As quoted in Singer, 1990, p. 210.

[18] J.S. Mill, 1969, pp. 57–58.

[19] Midgley, 1978, p. 34.

[20] Locke, 1988, Chapter 2, Section 12.

[21] Holland, 1996; Carlson, 2000; Holmes Rolston III, 1994. For more on Holland's view of nature see also Holland, 2004, pp. 28–41.

[22] As the English literary critic Raymond Williams once wrote, 'nature is one of the most complex words in the language'. This theme has been intensively explored in recent French philosophy. See generally Whiteside, 2002; and especially Latour, 2004. See also Soper, 1995, and Vogel, 2002.

[23] This example is taken from Singer, 2002, pp. 106–110.

[24] Goodall, 1986, pp. 530–534.

[25] For some examples, see Bekoff, 2000a.

[26] Ironically, nature may also prevent us from fully acting upon impartialist morality. For discussion see Jamieson, 2002a, ch.1, 2002b and 2006.

[27] While there are some relevant citations below, it is not easy to find a single source which explicitly embraces this view. However, I think that it is often presupposed by many in the environmental movement, as well as contributors to environmental policy, conservation biology, and environmental philosophy.

[28] For more criticism of this way of thinking see Moriarity and Woods, 1997.

[29] As quoted in Scully, 2002 p. 196.

[30] For difficulties in precisely characterising the concept of a trait, see Allen, 2002.

[31] The earliest paper that I know that develops this point is Sapontzis, 1980.

[32] See Boehm, 1999; de Waal, 1996; and Sober and Wilson, 1998.

[33] For further discussion, see Passmore, 1974.

[34] See Passmore, 1974, and Richard Sorabji, 1993.

[35] As quoted in Gruen and Jamieson, 1994, p. 30.

[36] Mill, 1969, p. 53.

[37] Mill, 1969, p. 54.

[38] See Beck, 1995.

[39] A good place to begin searching for information about Colorado's lynx reintroduction programme is http://wildlife.state.co.us/NR/rdonlyres/56F725F1-39DD-45E2-8F6F-5EE51AD03E2F/0/LynxUpdateNov92006.pdf. See also http://www.nativeecosystems.org.

[40] For a rather fluffy account, visit http://www.wildland-network.org.uk/reports_info/OOSTVAARDERS_ECO-CORRIDORS_HK05.pdf

[41] For some complications see Ariew, 2002.

[42] Bekoff, 2000b.

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