



REJOINDER

Kent Baldner

RAINFOREST

Kainginero,
Don't cut the trees
For your meagre harvest
Of corn and beans
For your hungry children.

Each tree that falls
Resounds around the planet
Each red-footed, green-jewelled frog
Smashed or burned
Sounds our death knell.

Each tree that falls
Crushing airy worlds of bromeliads
Fragrance of trampled orchids
Dying bewilderment
Of sloe-eyed, three-toed sloths
Writes our epitaph.

Each tree that falls
The beating of breasts
And wailing
Of our monkey cousins
At the forest edge
Warns
Kainginero
The ark is too small
For you
Too.

Frogs, bromeliads, monkeys, kaingineros
In this game of wealth and greed and power
There's no space for you anymore
You are
The dispossessed of the Earth.

— Mary de La Valette

Let me begin by thanking Professor Sapontzis for taking the time to respond to my paper. While we disagree on important issues, we agree on the value of pursuing this discussion.

Sapontzis' first two criticisms address differences between us regarding the foundation of values. He first rejects my claim that the environment can have value apart from sentient beings, and then the claim that focusing on sentience betrays some lingering anthropocentrism. These criticisms raise important questions that I cannot adequately address in this context. Consequently, the following should be understood as constituting only a preliminary response to questions that will require much more discussion.

Sapontzis argues that "[s]entient beings are not at the center of a consistent and adequate value theory because they are more important than non-sentient beings ..., [but] because it is through their relations to sentient beings that things come to have value." But why should I accept this? This is exactly the point of contention between us, and so needs to be defended rather than simply asserted. What, after all, is so important about sentience? The assumption seems to be that the experience of pleasure (or the satisfaction of one's desires) has an intrinsic positive value, and the experience of pain (or the frustration of one's desires), an intrinsic negative value. But it is this claim that the environmentalist rejects. If we grant that both pleasure and pain can serve some



DISCUSSION

evolutionary or ecological role, we must recognize that what advances evolutionary or ecological "ends" may not always maximize pleasure (or satisfaction) or minimize pain (or frustration). We must recognize that what can only be valued negatively from the standpoint of the individual sentient being can sometimes play a positive role with respect to preserving the "integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community." But which is the more fundamental of these ends?--that which is beneficial to the individual sentient being, or to the ecosystem upon which the existence of the individual depends?

This brings us to Sapontzis' first question, but at this point I can only suggest an answer. Rather than claim that values can exist only in relation to sentient beings, I would argue that they can be recognized only by sentient beings. But let me grant, for this discussion, that values can exist only in relation to sentient beings. Sentient beings, however, can exist only in relation to the ecosystem as a whole. What the environmentalist stresses is that the existence of individual sentient beings is so thoroughly dependent upon the interaction and harmony of the entire ecosystem, that it is only in abstract thought that we can contemplate the existence of individual sentient beings apart from the ecosystem of which they are part. But if we cannot ultimately distinguish between individual sentient beings and the natural environment that sustains them, then to claim that value exists only in relation to sentient beings is to allow that it exists throughout the environment as a whole.

Sapontzis' third point I simply reject: I have no qualms in allowing that nature can have a value for non-human sentient beings. I simply deny that this is the only value it has apart from human beings. And I have no problem in admitting that humans value nature for a variety of reasons. As to Sapontzis' final point, I would argue that the environmentalist position is itself "arrogant" or "paternalistic" only if all moral criticism involves these attitudes--a view I do not accept. What is arrogant is not the claim that certain parts of the natural order merit moral condemnation, but rather that there is something morally amiss in the very fabric of the natural world. My claim has been that we should not assume that we have something to teach the

natural world about morality, but rather that we may have something to learn from it.

