Between the Species

What (If Anything)
Do We Owe
to
Wild Animals?

ABSTRACT

It's widely agreed that animal pain matters morally—that we shouldn't, for instance, starve our animal companions, and that we should provide medical care to sick or injured agricultural animals, and not only because it benefits us to do so. But do we have the same moral responsibilities towards wild animals? Should we feed them if they are starving, and intervene to prevent them from undergoing other kinds of pain, for instance from predation? Using an example that includes both wild and domesticated animals, I outline two contrasting ways of thinking about our moral responsibilities with respect to assisting animals that are apparently in need. One approach is based entirely around animals' capacities; the other takes context and historical relations into account as well. While not attempting to adjudicate between these views, I'll point out the advantages and difficulties of both.

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1.Introduction

I'll begin by constructing an imaginary situation, but one that I hope is not too far-fetched. Suppose it's a hard winter, and an intrepid hiker is out for a long walk. The ground is icy, and packed with snow, and there's a strong cold wind. Fenced into a nearby field, the hiker sees two short-haired horses. The horses have no shelter, their water trough is frozen, and they haven't any food—conditions that are known to create poor horse welfare (University of Maine, 2003). In a corner of the same field, deep in the snow, there's a couple of wild deer—a doe and a fawn. The deer also lack shelter and water, and like the horses, have nothing to eat. As the hiker watches, a young coyote runs into the field and tries to bring down the fawn. Eventually, after various attempts to escape, the coyote tears down the fawn and there's a bloody struggle in the snow.

For that hiker passing by, this chilly winter scene might raise ethical questions. Should she help the cold and hungry horses, or at least find someone else who can assist them? But if so, does that mean, to be consistent, she should also help the cold and hungry deer? Should she intervene to prevent the coyote tearing down the fawn—assuming she could, without endangering herself? Or might such an intervention actually be wrong? Most generally: What kinds of moral responsibilities do we have to wild animals, such as the deer, and are these different from our responsibilities towards domestic animals, such as the horses?

A number of different responses to these ethical questions are possible. I'll focus on just two of them here. One possible response is that deer are just as morally significant as horses, and that whatever we owe to the horses, we also owe to the deer. So, if we should assist the horses, we should also assist

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the deer. This may not mean that we *treat* them in exactly the same way, but in principle what we owe to them is the same. A second kind of response distinguishes between what we owe to wild animals, such as the deer, and to domesticated animals, such as the horses. On this view, while we should assist domesticated animals when threatened by hunger, predators or disease, other things being equal, we have either no moral responsibility, or much less moral responsibility, to assist wild animals in similar situations.

I'll be exploring these two different responses to assisting animals in this paper. Both of them draw on important ethical frameworks, frameworks that currently play a role in governing assistance to needy fellow humans. Relatively little, though, has been written about assisting animals; understandably, the focus of work in animal ethics has primarily been on *harms* to animals, rather than on assisting them. However, as the field of animal ethics grows, concerns about how and when we should help animals are likely to become increasingly important (and probably, contentious).

I'll structure the paper as follows: First, I'll begin with some points of definition and clarification. Then I'll outline how one theoretical approach to animal ethics—an approach that I'll call "capacity-oriented"—would respond to this case, and, more generally to questions about assisting wild animals. I'll suggest that, although appealing in some ways, this approach may embroil us in broader, more troubling commitments in the wild. I'll then outline a contrasting, theoretical approach, which I'll call "contextual", and show how it supports an alternative position, where we have different moral responsibilities to animals in different contexts and relations to us. But this view also generates significant difficulties, and may end up being not

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much less demanding than the first. Yet, as I'll suggest in the conclusion, these views—though over-simplified as presented here—may well be preferable to the alternatives. So some development and reworking of these positions may be the best way forward in thinking about assisting animals.

2. Definitions and Clarifications: the law, moral status and wildness

(a) The law: My focus here is on animal ethics, rather than the law. That's not to say that the law isn't very significant here. For instance, in Texas, the treatment of the horses I've described would likely constitute a crime of neglect; the owner has "unreasonably failed to provide necessary food, water or care for a livestock animal in the person's custody" (TexCode §9 42.09). That it's illegal to neglect one's own horses may provide an additional motivation to assist the horses in this case, but my focus here is on ethical responsibilities that hold *independently* of whether they are legally recognized. I'm not suggesting, either, that ethical responsibilities *should* be legally recognized; an ethical argument that suffering wild animals should be assisted should not be taken to imply that such assistance should be a legal requirement. Indeed "duty to rescue" laws are controversial even in the human case, and are often not formalized.

(b) Animals and moral status: By "animals", I'll here refer to animals that are widely agreed to have experiential or subjective welfare (Keeling et. al. 2011); those whose lives can go better or worse for them "from the inside"; in particular, animals that are sentient, i.e. can feel pain, and can suffer. I will take suffering to include a "wide range of negative emotional states" (Dawkins 1980, 25). I'll assume that all mammals and birds fall into this category, at least. I'll further assume that if a being has welfare in this way, and can feel pain, we should

think of it as having "moral status"; it's the kind of being that should factor into our decision-making, because the states it is in *matter* to it. That pain in itself matters morally is, admittedly, denied on some philosophical views (some forms of moral contractarianism, for instance). However, the view that pain is sufficient for moral status is very widely accepted, and for reasons of space, I won't defend it further here. (For a much more detailed discussion and defense, see Palmer (2010, ch.1)) In saying this, I'm not intending to make any claims about how *much* these beings matter, in particular their moral significance in relation to humans; nor am I denying that there could be other, additional grounds for moral status. All I want to claim here is just that they count for *something*. I should also note that I'll only focus on what might be owed to wild animals *as individuals* here, rather than as species members or as contributors to ecosystems; these concerns raises other questions that I don't have space to consider.

(c) Wild animals: The term "wild animals" can be used in many different ways. "Wild animals" *could* mean "animals that are not tame" that is, it could be a *behavioral* term; it could mean "animals living in relatively uncultivated places"—that is, a *locational* term; or it could mean "non-domesticated animals", where domestication means something like belonging to a species or subspecies where breeding is selectively and intentionally controlled over generations (Palmer 2011). These definitions are all open to challenge; and some animals may be wild in all these ways. For the purposes of this paper, I'll use "wild" in the third sense, to mean *undomesticated* animals. The terms "wild" and "domesticated" though, are not intended to be exclusive, polar opposites. There are many animals that don't fall straightforwardly into either category; for instance those whose genetic makeup is unintentionally but systematically in-

fluenced by human activities such as hunting, and others whose breeding was once, but is no longer, selectively controlled by humans.

Having clarified these points, I'll return to the main question:

3. What (if anything) do we owe wild animals?

One basic point has already emerged: there would be something morally wrong about deliberately and gratuitously harming wild sentient animals for no meaningful reason. So, if I were to slowly torture and skin wild animals, causing them significant pain, for a trivial reason such as that I was bored, this would be morally wrong. Claiming that sentient animals directly count for *something,* I think, commits us to this conclusion. But this isn't very controversial. And it doesn't, of course, mean that all harms to, or killings of, wild animals are wrong. On some views, if one killed a sentient animal painlessly*,* even for trivial reasons, such a killing would be morally permissible. And there could be very substantial reasons for killing or harming wild animals—where there are serious conflicts of interests between humans and wild animals (for instance, over the transmission of a zoonotic disease); or where there are very significant human benefits to be gained. In some circumstances, almost all moral views, including both the views I'll be discussing, could ethically justify either inflicting pain on wild animals or killing them.

Although there are important issues here, there's already an extensive literature about harming wild animals (Hettinger 1994, Moriarty and Woods 1997). As I've already noted, much less has been said about cases such as the one with which I began. In these cases, the direct cause of animal suffering is non-

human—such as the weather, disease, lack of food, and predation. Does what we owe to wild animals include *assisting* them, as well as refraining from some kinds of unnecessary harm? Do we have any moral responsibility to feed, shelter or protect wild animals, and is this different from any responsibilities we have to domestic animals? It's in this context that I'll consider the two differing views I've already outlined: a *capacity-oriented* view, and *a contextual* view.

4. Capacity-oriented Consequentialist view

A number of different kinds of capacity-oriented views exist; in fact most animal ethicists to date have been capacity-oriented. Most prominently, animal rights views, such as those advocated by Tom Regan (1984) or Gary Francione (2000), fall into this category. However, I'll focus on a rather different kind of capacity-oriented view here: a consequentialist, rather than a rights one.

A capacity-oriented consequentialist view has two central—and distinct—features. The first is *capacity-orientation*. What matters about animals, from this perspective, is the particular morally-relevant capacities they possess and express, and only those capacities. Although a variety of animal capacities might be seen as valuable in this sense, including the capacity to have preferences or desires, I'll work with the capacities most commonly discussed: the capacities to undergo pain and suffering, and to feel pleasure. The second feature here is *consequentialism*. Consequentialist ethical theories are usually characterized as maintaining that only the consequences matter in terms of evaluating whether some action (or policy, or character trait etc) is morally good or bad. Standardly, "an action is morally right if and only if there is no other action, among those available to the agent, that has better consequences" (Shaw, 2007).

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The goal, then, is to bring about the *best expected consequences* in terms of what's good and what's bad (though there are different ideas of what *is* good and bad), normally by maximizing what's good, net of what's bad.

If we combine these features we create an approach where, roughly, we should aim to maximize the total amount of pleasure, net of pain and suffering, in the world. (Standard forms of *philosophical utilitarianism* look like this). Although this is the view I'll be discussing here, I should note that these two features can come apart. Animal rights views are capacity oriented without being consequentialist. And there are forms of consequentialism in which values not based on capacities are morally important. But still, the combination of capacity-orientation and consequentialism I've outlined is very common, especially in animal ethics, and so that's what I'll focus on here.

Let's return to my original example, and consider it through the lens of this kind of capacity-oriented consequentialism. At first sight, on this view, it would appear as though our passing hiker should assist both the horses and the deer. Both are suffering in ways that could be relieved; and the coyote is likely to cause the fawn acute pain. Since the hiker could act to reduce pain and suffering, it looks as though the best expected consequences would be brought about by doing so.

But it might be objected that this kind of intervention would *not*, on closer consideration, bring about the best consequences. Tending to domesticated animals—the horses—appears unproblematic. But suppose we fed all the starving deer in the world, and prevented all the painful coyote attacks? Wouldn't this bring us to the situation Aldo Leopold (1949) describes in *Thinking Like a Mountain*: with "the starved bones of the

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hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much"? Intervention could cause an explosive rise in deer populations, a corresponding spike in human feeding commitments, hungry and suffering predators, and so on—with a significant risk of causing more suffering, rather than less.

There's something in this concern, but I'm not sure how far it will withstand scrutiny. To consider it more closely requires a more careful account of different forms of consequentialism. I'll consider two possibilities here.

One relevant kind of consequentialism here is *act consequentialism*. On this view, an act is morally right if and only if the total amount of good—in this case pleasure—minus the total amount of pain, is greater than the net amount for any incompatible act available to the agent *on that occasion* (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2011). So, were we to encounter this situation, we should do whatever will bring about the greatest amount of good overall *on this occasion*, rather than being concerned about what would result if the same decision were taken on *every similar occasion*. This does not mean ignoring the expected long-term consequences of what we do on this occasion. It means that what we decide in *this* case doesn't necessarily commit us to doing the same thing in other, apparently similar situations; the acts relevant to each different situation should be judged independently. And taking this particular situation alone, assisting seems to be best. Feeding the deer appears to have better consequences than leaving them hungry. In the longer term, they may get hungry again; but we can reasonably expect that nourishing food now will reduce their total winter suffering. It's unlikely that the survival of these two particular deer alone will make a big difference in over-grazing (and therefore, animal suffering more broadly) in future years. We

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can also expect best consequences from protecting the fawn. The coyote may be hungry now, but its hunger is unlikely to be as bad as the fawn's pain (not to mention the loss of all the future pleasurable experience that this fawn's life might contain, if it continued to live). And while the coyote will certainly try to find something else to eat, it may scavenge, eat berries, or trash, that would cause less pain than killing the fawn. So in terms of expected consequences from this single situation, it seems likely that the passing hiker should assist, because *we owe wild animals what we owe generally*: to maximize pleasure net of pain, and we can reasonably expect assisting to achieve this in this particular case.

However, some consequentialists argue that focusing on individual acts does not necessarily bring about best consequences. Instead, they argue, we should adopt what Driver (2012, 86) calls the "indirection strategy": where "the right action is the action performed in accordance with (or as a result of) something else that maximizes the good, such as a set of rules or a type of motivation". The most widely accepted form of indirect consequentialism is rule conequentialism, and, for that reason, I'll focus on rule consequentialism here. A rule consequentialist argues that we should follow *rules* that "if communally accepted would, as far as we can tell, bring about the best consequences" (Hooker 2000, 1). This means that rather than thinking about all the consequences in this specific case, we should instead think about what communally accepted rule, if followed more generally in cases of this kind, we would expect to bring about best consequences.

Identifying such a rule isn't easy. A rule such as "We should always feed hungry wild animals" or "We should always assist animals threatened with predation" is very unlikely to bring

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about best consequences. But rules that affirm the contrary *also* seem unlikely to bring about best consequences. For instance "Never feed hungry wild animals" would appear to prohibit practices that seem harmless or that may promote good, such as feeding wild birds in the garden. This suggests that any rule would require very careful specification, and each rule would only apply to some subset of wild animal cases. This could become complex and unwieldy (which most rule consequentialists find problematic, since for communal acceptance, rules need to be fairly simple) and if specified far enough, would end up turning into act consequentialism.

Rule formation is itself tricky. But once we've begun thinking about general rules of this kind, broader questions are raised. After all, both rule and act consequentialism here are roughly committed to maximize the total amount of expected pleasure, net of pain, in the world. And this doesn't seem limited to assistance. It appears to extend to managing the natural world more broadly. After all, the natural world is full of pain and suffering. If humans should be trying to minimize pain and suffering in the world, then this does not mean not just causing, or relieving, existing suffering; presumably, it also entails trying to change the world such that less suffering arises in the first place. As McMahan (2010) recently suggested: "Suppose that we could arrange the gradual extinction of carnivorous species, replacing them with new herbivorous ones. Or suppose that we could intervene genetically, so that currently carnivorous species would gradually evolve into herbivorous ones,… If we could bring about the end of predation by one or the other of these means at little cost to ourselves, ought we to do it?" His answer to this question is, essentially that we should. It may not be possible just now, because we don't know enough about the potential effects of doing this on whole ecosystems, so we

might end up causing more suffering than we prevent. But the principle is clear: If we *could* do it, and it would not cause more suffering than not doing it, we *should*. From this perspective, what we owe all animals, wild or not, is to try to make their lives better, in whatever ways we can, including preventing the existence of animals that, overall, will make the lives of more animals worse.

This conclusion follows from the combination of the two features I identified earlier: capacity orientation and consequentialism. In terms of capacity-orientation: the focus only on animals' capacities, such as the capacities to feel pain and pleasure, makes the distinction signaled in the title of this paper—between "wild" and "domesticated", morally irrelevant. Wildness is not a *capacity*; it's more like the absence of a certain *relation*. What matters here is whether and how much an animal suffers, not whether it's wild or otherwise. Assuming that there are no significant physiological differences that (for instance) cause horses to suffer more from hunger than deer (or vice versa), there are no relevant moral differences between them either. When combined with consequentialism—the aim at best expected outcomes—this view means that all pain and pleasure falls within the scope of moral concern. On a consequentialist view of this kind, suffering is suffering, wherever it's found; and if we can relieve it, or prevent it arising, without creating equivalent suffering or diminution of pleasure elsewhere, we should. We owe to wild sentient animals exactly what we owe to *any* sentient animal: to promote their pleasure, and to prevent or relieve their pain and suffering, where we can do so without diminishing pleasure and increasing pain in others. Of course, there may be some different long-term consequences down the line from assisting horses and assisting deer—for instance, feeding deer may negatively impact the

genotype of future deer. But the suffering of wild deer, *in itself*, is just as demanding of our moral attention as the suffering of domestic horses.

Although not *all* kinds of consequentialism turn out exactly like this (some philosophers have created less demanding forms—perhaps Scheffler's (1994) hybrid consequentialism, satisficing consequentialism, or Varner's (2012) two-level consequentialism), something like this conclusion flows from most leading consequentialist views in animal ethics. However, the alternative contextual, non-consequentialist approach I'll consider now comes to a contrasting view—that we have different obligations towards animals with whom we have different relations, even if the animals are very similar in terms of morally-relevant capacities (such as the capacity to feel pleasure and pain).

5. Contextual, Non-Consequentialist View

The kind of contextual position I'll outline here differs with respect to both the two key features of the previous view. First, although animals' capacities—such as the capacity to suffer—are important, they aren't all that matters morally. Certain relations between humans and animals matter too. In particular, on this view, "backward looking" considerations are important—that is, how animals got into the situations they are in. It's often maintained that concerns of this kind are morally important in the human case. For instance, choosing to have a child, it's frequently argued, creates special responsibilities to that child that one doesn't have to any other child. (For instance, see O'Neill 1979, 26.) On a contextual view, arguments with a similar form also apply to domesticating animals.

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Second, the kind of contextual view I'll discuss is not consequentialist (though consequentialist forms of contextual views might be possible). What's central are certain constraints, in particular *not causing harms to others* (taking harms in something like Feinberg's (1992) sense to mean the wrongful setting back of significant interests). At first sight, this might be taken to suggest that there are no moral responsibilities to assist at all, thus moving from a view that may have seemed over-reaching, to one that has *no* reach! The hiker, after all, is not planning to harm the animals; the question is about assisting animals that are already suffering.

But this is too simple: there are important human/animal entanglements here. After all, humans bred these horses, and bred them selectively, in ways that made them vulnerable to the cold, with thinner, sleeker coats than wild horses. And they were made yet more vulnerable once in existence by having their coats kept short, and by being confined, so that it's impossible for them to independently seek shelter or food elsewhere. Although humans have not directly harmed these horses, then, they have *made them vulnerable*. This vulnerability may not exactly have been *intended*, but it was at least easily foreseeable: if animals are kept with short coats, confined without shelter, not provided with sufficient food and water, and it's the winter, it's obvious that they will be vulnerable to the cold. And, since humans have put them in the position where they are now suffering, on this contextual view, there are special obligations to assist. The reason why the horses should be assisted is not just that they are suffering, but because humans are responsible for making them vulnerable to that suffering.

However, the wild deer are in a different situation. Humans haven't selectively bred them, and they haven't been confined

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or restrained. Their lives are, essentially, independent of ours. So, there's no special obligation on this basis to feed the hungry deer, nor to protect hungry deer from a hungry coyote. On this contextual view, then, in contrast to the capacity-oriented one outlined earlier, while we should not intentionally harm wild animals without good reason, if we haven't caused their vulnerability, we don't have any special obligation to assist them. What happens to them is *not our moral business*.

It's worth noting that this contextual view *isn't* based on the argument that we shouldn't interfere with what's "wild" or "natural", or with wild processes such as predation. Some environmental ethicists do make such claims (in fact, in another context, Preston (2011) recently called non-interference in nature the "presumptive argument" in environmental ethics). Certainly, in some cases, this contextual view and wildness-preserving accounts of environmental ethics will coincide in practice. But on this contextual view, assisting wild animals isn't necessarily *wrong;* rather, it just isn't normally required, even if it would relieve suffering, because the kind of relationship that would generate such special obligations to assist doesn't normally exist between humans and wild animals. On this view, obligations to assist only arise when there is some kind of historical entanglement. (There might be a different version of this view—that requirements to assist *do* exist in such cases but that they are *much weaker* where there's no prior entanglement; however, I don't have space to develop such a view here.)

To say "doesn't *normally* exist", though, doesn't mean that there are *no* occasions where wild animals might be owed assistance. If humans prevent wild animals from living independent lives, then special obligations to assist them may be acquired.

So, captivity or habitat destruction might create such special obligations. "Wild" and "domesticated", then, are terms that point to broader relations of independence versus human-created dependence and vulnerability. It's these relations, rather than being "wild" or "domesticated" in themselves, that matter here.

An implication of this contextual view is that—unlike on the kind of consequentialist view I outlined earlier—there would be no reason to aim to reduce the amount of suffering in nature by managing or shaping nature differently, assuming we could do so successfully. A contextual view alone wouldn't *forbid* doing this (though there might be *othe*r good reasons not to do it) but it's not morally required, nor even morally desirable, on this view, to make wild nature a less painful place.

This contextual approach, then, which takes into account *relations* as well as *capacities*, and does not aim to bring about best consequences, may appear to have some advantages over a capacity-oriented, consequentialist view. It reflects the widely held belief that special relations, (for instance, of created dependence, as with our own children) create special obligations; and it offers a less all-encompassing vision of our ethical responsibilities than do standard forms of consequentialism (though still, in the animal case, obligations significantly more demanding than those we normally accept, since it's rare, for instance, for anyone to consider that anything at all is owed to individual wild animals made vulnerable by human habitat destruction).

However, this contextual approach has its own difficulties that may lead us to think that this, more restricted view of what we owe wild animals is nonetheless untenable. I'll consider just two of the many difficulties here.

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(a) This view draws on what Nozick (1974, 155) calls a "historical principle", where past circumstances or actions can be a direct justification for different entitlements. It *looks back* at the ways in which people did (or did not) became entangled with particular animals in order to work out what's owed to them. However, as with similar human cases, the history of entanglement may not be clear. And, even more significantly, there's a problem about who's supposed to be responsible for assistance. For instance, in the horse case I've raised: Suppose a farmer has bred these horses, and then left them in the snowy field without food, water or shelter. It's plausible that *the farmer* has special obligations to provide for the horses, obligations that she's failing to meet. But just because *she* has failed to do what she should, does that mean that a passer-by inherits her responsibilities? Does this contextual view presuppose some idea of collective responsibility—that *I* am responsible for what *other people* do—or fail to do?

There are, I think, ways of resolving such questions about who is responsible for assistance in cases like these (similar issues arise in human cases, for instance in terms of reparations claims; see Palmer (2010) for a more detailed discussion.) But problems about *who* has moral responsibility for *what* do make this contextual view complicated in practice. It may work better in policy-making contexts, where historical relations and responsibilities can be more carefully considered, than on an everyday basis where individuals are reacting and making decisions about particular situations on short timescales with incomplete information.

(b) A second factor makes this even more complicated: fewer and fewer animals live completely independently of humans, even where their breeding is not controlled by people.

Although the deer in this case have not been selectively bred, human wildlife management has probably had some impact on their existence or their lives. And anthropogenic climate change is already affecting many wild animals' habitats, raising questions about whether we should, in some cases, embark on programs of assisted migration. If anthropogenic phenomena such as climate change create moral responsibilities to assist wild animals, then the contextual view appears to become almost as demanding as the consequentialist, capacity-oriented view.

I can only offer some very broad responses to this complication here. The first, most general point, I think, is that obligations to assist individual animals that result from broad anthropogenic environmental impacts such as climate change are likely to be weaker than those that result from practices such as selective breeding. One reason for this is the nature of the human practices involved. In at least some cases, animals are deliberately and directly bred to be vulnerable—laboratory mice genetically modified to develop particular diseases, for instance. In other cases, selectively breeding and confining animals—as with the horses—makes them vulnerable in ways that, as I've noted, can easily be foreseen, even if not exactly intended. And in all modern domestication cases, at least, humans directly intend to create and shape animals' bodies. The impacts of climate change on wild animals are somewhat different: while it is increasingly obvious that there are and will be effects on wild animals, these are effects of a practice not aimed at animals at all; and in this sense it is less intentional (and certainly less predictable) than the effects of domestication (though this argument will likely weaken over time)(see Nolt 2011). Second, it's currently difficult, and likely to remain difficult, to identify exactly what ecological shifts actually can be attributed to climate change. Third, as current research indi-

cates, some animals will actually benefit from climate change, so *these* animals, the beneficiaries, would not be owed any assistance. Fourth, in many cases it might not be possible to sustain assistance. If, for instance, an area is becoming significantly drier, the provision of (say) replacement artificial wetlands habitat for animals, while in some sense responding to human-created vulnerability, is likely to create more vulnerability over time, given the degree of climate change to which we are now committed. It may be better in these cases just to stand back, and to allow animals better adapted to dry climatic conditions to move into the area. And finally, any assistance should not generate new obligations. So, for instance, assisted migration is one way of helping certain animals made vulnerable by climate change. But this practice raises the danger of creating vulnerability in *new* animal populations—those that have to compete with new residents—as well as potentially producing stress and distress to those animals moved to new habitats. So, climate change raises very difficult issues: concerning the kind of intention involved, the benefits as well as costs it may bring to wild animals, and because assistance may generate new vulnerabilities while at the same time relieving others. In cases of this kind, a contextual view would seem to suggest at least very careful consideration before acting to assist. But even if, for these reasons, the special obligations to animals created by climate change may be less stringent than it at first appears, these kinds of problems certainly do make this kind of contextual view extremely complex.

6. Conclusion

I've outlined two different theoretical ideas of what we might owe to wild animals, focusing on when (if ever) we should help them. First, I considered a consequentialist, capacity-oriented view, which by different routes maintains that we should aim to

bring about greatest pleasure, net of pain and suffering, in the world, including among wild animals. Some philosophical and religious traditions regard this as the best way of viewing our obligations towards animals, accepting the focus on animals' capacities, not their relations to us, and the demanding ethical position that this view implies. Then I considered a contextual view, one maintaining that *harming* animals, whether wild or not, without good reason is unethical; but that we're only required to assist them if there's some sense in which we are responsible for their vulnerability or suffering. This seems at first sight less demanding, but raises questions about who is responsible for doing what, and appears to become more demanding if we take anthropogenic phenomena such as climate change to create obligations to assist.

Both these views seem unsatisfactory in various ways; in particular, perhaps *both* commit us to too much with respect to what we owe to wild animals. But what are the alternatives, assuming that we take animal suffering seriously?

(a) One possibility is just to reject the idea that we have obligations to assist *any* animals, including companion and agricultural animals, except where it benefits people, even where humans are responsible for the suffering or vulnerability. Since it usually does benefit people to look after their companion or agricultural animals, this would get some of the way to protecting domesticated animals, but not many wild ones. However, it leaves us with a lot of difficult cases, and provides us with no moral grounds for judging the actions of those who do abandon or neglect domesticated animals, if they can claim that it's not in their interests (as owners)

to continue to provide for them. This is surely a problematic position.

(b) A second possibility is to identify a distinction between what's owed to wild and domesticated animals that's not dependent, as is the contextual account, on a 'historical principle' of how animal suffering or vulnerability came about—since this view will inevitably generate assistance to some wild animals—but on some other factor. However, I'm not sure what this account might be, nor how it would have the ethical plausibility that created dependence and vulnerability carries.

Neither of these possibilities obviously supplants the positions I've discussed in more detail in this paper. But certainly, developments and refinements of the capacity-oriented consequentialist view and the contextual view I've discussed are not only possible but also desirable. I've tried to give a balanced account of the merits and difficulties with both positions (though obviously in somewhat simplified form). I expect that much more complex and nuanced accounts of when and whether we should assist animals will shortly emerge in the growing scholarship on animal ethics.

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