

Hunting: Animal Liberationists and Environmental Holists Agree

PHIL 138

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Your paper is well-written and wonderfully clear and precise. You do a superb job explaining tricky philosophical arguments in your own words. Really great job.

Disagreements between environmentalists and animal activists are often presented as absolute. I favor an analysis that looks at both groups at different levels. While environmentalists and animal activists disagree at the theoretical level, they can agree at the level of policy. I begin by exploring the theoretical differences between the two groups and progress on to explain how they agree on policy.

At the level of theory, environmentalists and animal activists differ on what has inherent value or deserves direct moral consideration. For environmental holists, collectives such as ecosystems and species have value of their own.¹ Other environmentalists give value to each individual living entity, and consider its direct moral standing, interests and needs accordingly.² Animal activists, however, disagree. They would not consider a single flower, or a species of flowers, to have value of its own. Animal liberationists such as Singer are concerned with maximizing the welfare of individual animals. This welfare or happiness is maximized by reducing pain for animals that can suffer pain, or satisfying the future-desires or preferences of self-conscious animals.³ For animal rights activists like Regan, on the other hand, nonhuman animals

¹ Leopold, p. 46

² Varner, Biocentric Individualism, p. 110

³ Varner, p. 102-104

have moral rights. Their basic right is the right not to be harmed to benefit others.⁴ This right is based on mental capacities; and tends to be stronger for normal mammals over one year of age.⁵ These theoretical differences on what has direct value and moral worth appear to imply that environmentalists and animal activists cannot agree on policy.

Comment [LGG1]: Well done overall. This is both succinct and precise.

In practice, however, they do not always disagree on policy. I use the case of therapeutic hunting of obligatory management species to show how environmental holists and animal liberationists can make the same policy recommendation. Therapeutic hunting protects the welfare of a particular species or ecosystem.⁶ It involves obligatory species management when a species, such as deer, overproduces and exceeds the capacity its habitat can support.⁷ Such management is considered biologically necessary to save the habitat from damage and ensure the survival of the species. Since environmental holists value ecosystems and species and want to preserve the integrity of both, they support biologically necessary therapeutic hunting of obligatory management species.⁸

Comment [LGG2]: Great

Animal liberationists like Singer agree with their policy conclusion. His hedonistic utilitarian calculus is appropriate for therapeutically hunting animals that have sentience or the capacity to suffer, but cannot have desires or plans for the future.⁹ Under this calculus, we have an obligation to minimize pain and maximize pleasure.¹⁰ It is

⁴ Varner, p.104

⁵ Varner, p. 105

⁶ Varner, p.98

⁷ Varner, p. 98

⁸ Varner, p. 99

⁹ Varner, p. 100

¹⁰ Varner, p. 102

permissible to therapeutically hunt a sentient animal without future desires if it causes less pain than letting nature proceed uninterrupted.¹¹ For instance, when a population of ducks exceeds the maximum number a habitat can support, nonfatal methods such as birth control are not effective or available, and letting ducks live damages the habitat, causing greater harm to the interests of other species as well as future generations of ducks, hunting ducks is permissible.¹² A happy duck that survives as a consequence of the hunt can replace the less happy duck killed.¹³ In Varner's analysis, such management is permissible, but not obligatory because ducks do not usually overpopulate and damage their habitat.¹⁴ I argue that in cases where they do overpopulate and damage their habitat, managing their numbers is biologically obligatory and not merely permissible. Thus, Singer's hedonistic calculus for sentient animals without preferences supports therapeutically hunting obligatory management species.¹⁵

Comment [LGG3]: This point could be clearer. What does it mean to be replaced in this context? Why is it ethically permissible to think this way?

Hence, some environmentalists and animal activists can make the same policy recommendation even when they disagree on theory. This agreement suggests that some groups of environmentalists and animal activists can join forces to work for policies that benefit both animals and nonhuman nature.

Bibliography

¹¹ Varner, p. 102

¹² Varner, p. 102-4

¹³ Varner, p. 102

¹⁴ Varner, p. 102

¹⁵ Varner, p. 104

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