

Consequentialism and Nonhuman Animals¹

Tyler M. John & Jeff Sebo

Abstract:

Consequentialism is thought to be in significant conflict with animal rights theory because it does not regard activities such as confinement, killing, and exploitation as in principle morally wrong. Proponents of the “Logic of the Larder” argue that consequentialism results in an implausibly pro-exploitation stance, permitting us to eat farmed animals with positive well-being to ensure future such animals exist. Proponents of the “Logic of the Logger” argue that consequentialism results in an implausibly anti-conservationist stance, permitting us to exterminate wild animals with negative well-being to ensure future such animals do not exist. We argue that this conflict is overstated. Once we have properly accounted for indirect effects, such as the role that our policies play in shaping moral attitudes and behavior and the importance of accepting policies that are robust against deviation, we can see that consequentialism may converge with animal rights theory significantly, even if not entirely.

Keywords:

Animal rights, Logic of the Larder, Logic of the Logger, conservation, farmed animal welfare, wild animal welfare, two-level utilitarianism, effective altruism, meat paradox, population ethics

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I. Introduction

Consequentialist moral theories and nonhuman animals share a long and complicated history. On one hand, some of the earliest Western philosophers to take seriously the moral status of nonhuman animals were the British utilitarians Jeremy Bentham, J.S. Mill, and Henry Sidgwick. Moreover, contemporary utilitarian Peter Singer is often credited with having started the modern-day animal rights movement with the publication of *Animal Liberation*. Consequentialist principles motivate many animal advocates in general, and are at the foundation of the effective animal advocacy movement in particular.²

On the other hand, many philosophers and advocates question whether consequentialism adequately respects the moral status of nonhuman animals, in much the same way that they question whether consequentialism adequately respects the moral status of humans. Familiar critiques of consequentialism emerge with new life in the context of assessing the moral status of nonhuman animals, such as the critique that consequentialism regards individuals as fungible receptacles of value, which is to be promoted regardless of the means of its promotion.

In this chapter we will focus on two related issues that arise for consequentialists regarding nonhuman animals, one regarding domesticated animals and the other regarding wild animals. Regarding domesticated animals, some philosophers believe that consequentialism results in an implausibly pro-exploitation stance, according to which, if farmed animals have positive well-being, then we are morally permitted if not required to increase the number of farmed animals in the world, all else equal. Regarding wild animals, some philosophers believe

² Animal Charity Evaluators, 2017.

that consequentialism results in an implausibly anti-conservationist stance, according to which, if wild animals have negative well-being, then we are morally permitted if not required to decrease the number of wild animals in the world, all else equal.

This chapter assesses whether standard forms of consequentialism have these results. Our approach echoes arguments from numerous consequentialist writers before us, such as Henry Sidgwick and R.M. Hare: We should make a distinction between *criteria of rightness*, which determine which actions are right in theory, and *decision procedures*, which we use to decide which actions to perform in practice.³ When we do, we find that consequentialism as a criterion of rightness recommends a partly consequentialist, partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure for most people in most situations. In our view, this partly consequentialist, partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure conflicts with pro-exploitation and anti-conservation stances. Thus, we will argue, the consequentialist case for abolition of animal agriculture and conservation of wild animal habitats is stronger than many philosophers appreciate.

Before we begin, we should make some caveats about the scope of our discussion. First, there are many normative questions about which consequentialists disagree, some which bear on the topics that we discuss. These questions include: Should we accept hedonism, desire satisfactionism, or something else as our theory of the good? Should we accept act consequentialism, rule consequentialism, or something else as our theory of the right? And so on. We will not be able to discuss all these issues here. Instead, we will focus on classical

³ Feldman, 1986, 1993; Hare, 1981; Parfit, 1984, pp. 24–28; Sidgwick, 1874, pp. 489–490.

utilitarianism (i.e., hedonist, maximizing,⁴ totalist, act consequentialism), and we will note issues about which different consequentialist theories have different implications.

Second, there are many empirical questions about which consequentialists disagree, some of which bear on the topics that we discuss as well. For example, do farmed animals and wild animals in fact have positive or negative well-being? Does our individual behavior make a difference regarding how many farmed animals or wild animals are in the world? And so on. Once again, we will not be able to discuss all these issues here. Instead, we will stipulate answers to these questions for the sake of discussion where necessary, and we will allow these questions to remain open where possible. In all cases, we will do our best to note these questions where they arise and to explain why we approach them in the way that we are.

Third, and relatedly, we will not provide a conclusive answer to the questions we are considering. How many domesticated and wild animals there should be, and what we should do in order to realize these population levels, are extraordinarily complicated questions that require comprehensive normative and empirical analysis to answer. Instead, we will do the following. First, we will situate nonhuman animals in consequentialist theory. Second, we will summarize and evaluate arguments that philosophers have made regarding consequentialism, farmed animals, and wild animals. Third, we will introduce a set of considerations that we take to provide strong, and possibly decisive, support for abolitionist and conservationist stances from a consequentialist perspective.

II. Background

⁴ We take maximizing consequentialism to be compatible with certain forms of scalar consequentialism, such as those developed by Gustafsson (2016) and Sinhababu (2018), in that all such views regard maximizing the good as uniquely maximally right.

II.I. Situating animals in consequentialist theory

We take consequentialism to be a family of moral theories according to which the rightness of actions is entirely a function of their consequences. Philosophers disagree widely about the scope of this family.⁵ As such, and for the sake of simplicity and specificity, we focus on paradigmatic forms of consequentialism which are impartially benevolent and which reject the act/omission distinction and other standard deontological distinctions.

Understood in this way, consequentialism has historically been a more species-egalitarian family of moral theories than its competitors. This is partly due to the influence of classical utilitarians, who appreciated that a principled, impartially benevolent, welfarist moral theory implies that all sentient beings have equal moral standing. As Bentham famously stated, “The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?”⁶ By contrast, nonconsequentialist theorists such as Kantians and contractualists have for the most part only recently begun to accept that nonhumans can have moral standing at all.⁷ Our view is that the historically consequentialist view is correct. We therefore assume throughout that *all animals are equal*, in the sense that all animals' interests merit equal moral consideration.

Much of the modern-day project of determining how to maximize impartial good is taken up by the effective altruism community. Effective altruism is, broadly, the project of using evidence and reason to determine how to improve lives as much as possible, and then acting

⁵ Portmore, 2009; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2019.

⁶ Bentham, 1879.

⁷ For examples, see Donaldson & Kymlicka (2011), Korsgaard (2018), and Rowlands (1997).

accordingly.⁸ While effective altruism is compatible with other moral theories, many people see it as characteristically consequentialist. This is partly because consequentialists such as Toby Ord and Peter Singer developed the idea of effective altruism, and partly because the idea of effective altruism focuses centrally on maximizing good outcomes.⁹

Effective altruists assess the priority of different focus areas using three heuristics: importance, tractability, and neglectedness.¹⁰ A problem is more important to the extent that solving it would make a positive difference to the world. A problem is more tractable to the extent that it is easy to solve. A problem is more neglected to the extent that few people are working on solving it. While there are important limitations to this framework,¹¹ when properly applied it serves as a useful guide to identifying the problems that are, in consequentialist terms, the most important problems to address.

Using the importance, tractability, neglectedness framework, effective altruists have identified three major areas as among the highest-priority cause areas for altruistic intervention: animal welfare, global health and development, and existential risk reduction. Moreover, within animal welfare, effective altruists think that farmed animal welfare and wild animal welfare are the highest-priority issues.

Consider farmed animal welfare first. This issue is highly important due to its immense scale: we harm 100+ billion domesticated animals and hundreds of billions of wild animals per year in our global food system.¹² This issue is also highly neglected: People devote much less time, energy, and money to farmed animal welfare than to other issues, such as companion

⁸ MacAskill, 2017.

⁹ In a 2017 survey, about 2/3 of EAs reported accepting or leaning towards consequentialism.

¹⁰ MacAskill, 2015.

¹¹ Dickens, 2016; Wiblin, 2016.

¹² Schlottmann & Sebo 2018.

animal welfare. Finally, this issue is also highly tractable: People are currently pursuing a variety of promising approaches involving social, institutional, political, and technological change.

Now consider wild animal welfare. This issue is even larger in scale than farmed animal welfare: anywhere between 10^{13} - 10^{16} vertebrates and 10^{18} - 10^{22} invertebrates live in the wild at any given time, many with low levels of well-being.¹³ This issue is also even more neglected than farmed animal welfare: Hardly anyone is working on it at all. However, wild animal welfare is not nearly as tractable as farmed animal welfare, since we currently lack the political will to promote wild animal welfare as well as knowledge about what we can do to efficiently improve the lives of wild animals.¹⁴

While effective altruists agree that farmed animal welfare is more tractable than wild animal welfare, there are many uncertainties with respect to both issues. With respect to farmed animal welfare, we need to know whether to aim to abolish or regulate animal agriculture, as well as how to pursue these ends. With respect to wild animal welfare, we need to know whether to aim to increase, decrease, or maintain wild animal populations, as well as how to pursue these ends. In both cases, we need to strike a balance between a willingness to be humble in the face of difficult questions and a willingness to be proactive with respect to urgent issues.

II.II. Sophisticated consequentialism

We believe that, as consequentialists think about how to answer these questions, it is important to appreciate the distinction between (a) *criteria of rightness*, i.e., the principles that

¹³ Tomasik, 2018.

¹⁴ Delon & Purves, 2018.

determine which actions are right in theory, and (b) *decision procedures*, i.e., the principles that agents use to decide which actions to perform in practice.¹⁵ This distinction is important because, as many consequentialists have observed, it might not always be the case that consulting a particular principle, such as the principle of utility, is the best way to comply with that principle.

There are many reasons why the decision procedures we ought to use might be different from our criteria of rightness. One reason concerns complexity. Insofar as we lack the time, energy, and information necessary to apply complex principles, we should apply simpler principles instead. Another concerns biases and heuristics. Insofar as complex principles create more space for bias to operate, we should apply simpler principles instead. Another concerns moral psychology. Insofar as our behavior depends on factors other than explicit moral reasoning, we should attend to these factors as well. And so on.

With that in mind, our view, stated roughly and generally, is that consequentialist theorists who have defended so-called “indirect consequentialism,” “sophisticated consequentialism,” or “two-level consequentialism” are correct.¹⁶ Classical utilitarianism is correct as criterion of rightness: We morally ought to perform the acts which maximize net pleasure for all sentient beings from now until the end of time. However, for most people in most situations, a partly consequentialist and partly nonconsequentialist framework is the optimal decision procedure. According to this kind of decision procedure, we should aim to maximize expected utility, but only where this is compatible with respecting rights, developing and maintaining relationships of care, and developing and maintaining virtuous character traits. While different decision procedures may be optimal for different people in different contexts,

¹⁵ Hare, 1981.

¹⁶ Brandt, 1984; Cocking & Oakley, 1995; Hare, 1981; McNaughton, 1998; Sidgwick, 1874; Wiland, 2007.

decision procedures of this kind generally strike a good balance between (a) preserving the benefits of consequentialist thinking and (b) limiting the risks of consequentialist thinking.

With that said, we should qualify this claim in two ways. First, we are open to the possibility that we are wrong. After all, these are difficult questions, and biases and heuristics can affect our application of any decision procedure. For example, once we accept that we should accept a partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure, it might be tempting to simply select whatever decision procedure tells us what we want to hear, and then rationalize our choice on specious consequentialist grounds. We will not be able to fully address this concern here, but we will note where it might be arising, and we will approach our own analysis with a degree of skepticism accordingly.

Second, we suspect that, even if we are right, there can be exceptional cases where a fully consequentialist decision procedure which suspends nonconsequentialist constraints is best. For example, it might be that an optimal decision procedure would allow you to decide to kill someone if doing so is the only way to save 1,000,000 people, even though you should ordinarily regard killing someone as prohibited on nonconsequentialist grounds. In this case, you would not be denying the indirect value of nonconsequentialist considerations. You would instead simply be accepting that the nature of this case makes it clear that a fully consequentialist decision procedure is ideal. However, we think that cases of legitimate suspension of nonconsequentialist constraints as weighty as rights are rare, and may not occur at all for many people.

We think that this kind of “sophisticated consequentialism” has interesting implications for a wide range of issues in animal ethics. For example, we think that it implies that we should support the development of a broad, pluralistic animal advocacy movement that involves many

different, and seemingly conflicting, approaches.¹⁷ In what follows, we will focus on implications regarding how many farmed and wild animals there should be in the world, and what we should be doing to promote these population levels. Without attempting to fully answer these questions here, we will argue that there is a stronger consequentialist case for abolition of animal agriculture and conservation of wild animal habitats than many philosophers assume.

III. Farmed animals and the Logic of the Larder

III.I. Background

The standard argument that consequentialists should aim to reduce farmed animal populations, all else equal, relies on the assumption that farmed animals have net negative well-being. At least in countries with developed, industrialized economies, which will be our focus, there are good reasons for embracing this assumption. For brevity, consider the fates of farmed chickens, who make up over 99% of the population of farmed land animals in the U.S. Approximately 99.9% of chickens farmed for meat and 98.2% of chickens farmed for eggs live in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.¹⁸ Lori Gruen writes on the lives of such chickens:¹⁹

Most of these hens are kept in small wire cages, called “battery cages,” with between three and eight other hens. The battery cages are stacked on top of each other indoors in

¹⁷ Sebo & Singer, 2018.

¹⁸ CAFOs are defined by the EPA as farms with upwards of 37,500 meat chickens and upwards of 25,000 laying hens, respectively (Reese, 2019).

¹⁹ Gruen, 2011, p. 83.

sheds that can contain upward of 100,000 hens. The battery cage is so small that the hens are unable to stretch their wings or turn around. Because of the stress, boredom, fear, and close quarters, hens will peck at each other, so most are routinely debeaked, a process that involves a hot blade cutting off the tip of the beak through a thick layer of highly sensitive tissue. Debeaking causes lasting pain and impairs the hen's ability to eat, drink, wipe her beak, and preen normally.

Many other impacts reduce chicken well-being as well—the pain and stress of laying each of 300 eggs per year, an inability to stand due to rapid growth leading to chronic leg pain and constant sores from sitting in their own excrement, and more—and even setting these aside it is clear that animals raised on such CAFOs have profoundly negative well-being.

However, even if the vast majority of farmed animals have negative well-being, there may be some farmed animals who presently exist—such as some grass-fed “beef” cattle—or who might exist in the future—such as genetically engineered, pain-free chickens—who have neutral or positive well-being. Dwelling on such cases has led some to defend the so-called “Logic of the Larder” (hereafter LARDER):²⁰

[Where farmed animals have positive well-being,] the consequence to others of buying that meat in the grocery store, rather than asparagus, is good; you create farm animals whose lives are worth living. ... So if you, like me, think your actions are more moral

²⁰ Hanson, 2002. See also Cowen, 2005; Hare, 1993; Posner, 2004; Salt, 1914; Singer, 1999; Stephen, 1896.

when you do more good for others, you should agree with me that [this] meat is moral, and veggies are immoral.

The idea here is that, if consequentialism is true, and if some farmed animals have positive well-being, then there is a *pro tanto* moral reason to promote a world that includes these farmed animals instead of a world that excludes them.²¹ This might mean that we have *pro tanto* moral reasons to eat animal products that come from such a farm and to support the existence of such a farm in other ways. Many defenders of LARDER further suppose that these moral reasons are ultimately undefeated, such that, all-things-considered, consequentialists ought to eat some “humanely-raised” meat.

LARDER makes only weak assumptions about population axiology. In particular, it assumes a weak version of the Mere Addition Principle:²² that adding animals with positive well-being to our actual world does not make the world worse, holding everything else fixed. It is not committed to rejecting the Asymmetry Intuition, or critical level or averageist axiologies, though each of these axiologies will change the conditions under which adding animals with positive well-being to the world would not worsen that world.

While many people writing on LARDER have focused on its implications for the ethics of eating animals, it is clear that the argument has broader implications for our relationships with nonhuman animals. If consequentialism requires agents to take actions which increase the number of farmed animals with positive well-being, all else equal, then it might require us to

²¹ The question whether eating meat in fact increases the demand for meat and so causes future animals to exist is one that has been thoroughly explored elsewhere, and we do not take it up here. For our part, we find persuasive Kagan’s (2011) reasoning. For a persuasive parallel discussion in the context of climate change, see Broome (2018). See also: Buldolfson, 2015; Gruen and Jones, 2016; Schlottman & Sebo, 2018; Singer, 2011.

²² For more on the Mere Addition Principle, see Arrhenius (2012).

support animal agriculture in other ways too, for example by aiming to regulate rather than abolish animal agriculture as an industry. Whereas animal rights theory regards animal farming as anathema, consequentialism on this interpretation might regard it as welcome.

Some philosophers thus reply to LARDER by rejecting consequentialism. They claim that supporting animal agriculture is wrong whether or not farmed animals have positive well-being, on the grounds that animal agriculture treats animals merely as means, cultivates vicious attitudes toward animals, or places us in oppressive relationships with animals.²³

Other philosophers reply to LARDER by rejecting the idea that consequentialism supports increasing farmed animal populations. For example, Matheny & Chan argue that supporting animal agriculture is unlikely to maximize value all things considered, since other uses of our time, energy, and money will have better net consequences.²⁴

Other philosophers reply to LARDER by accepting the idea that consequentialism supports increasing farmed animal populations. If engaging in or supporting animal agriculture is a net benefit for farmed animals, then we are indeed morally permitted, if not morally required, to engage in or support animal agriculture, all else equal.

We are sympathetic with all of these replies. First, we agree with nonconsequentialist critics of LARDER that we should treat animals as ends, cultivate virtuous character traits toward animals, and cultivate relationships of care with animals. However, we think that we should do these things from within a consequentialist framework—because doing these things maximizes net pleasure in the world—rather than as an alternative to a consequentialist framework.

²³ Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011, Chs. 2, 4; Gruen, 2011, Ch. 3.

²⁴ Matheny & Chan, 2005.

Second, we agree with consequentialist critics of LARDER that animal agriculture is unlikely to be a net benefit for farmed animals in practice. However, we think that there is a deeper reason for consequentialists to reject LARDER, which is that even treating LARDER as an open question is likely to be a net harm for nonhuman animals and other sentient beings in most cases in practice, for precisely the reasons that nonconsequentialists are discussing.²⁵

Third, we agree with consequentialist proponents of LARDER that, if animal agriculture is a net benefit for farmed animals and other sentient beings, then we are morally permitted, if not morally required, to support animal agriculture, all else equal, in theory. However, we also think that we are not morally permitted to support animal agriculture in most cases in practice, again for the reasons that nonconsequentialists are discussing.

Our aim in what follows, then, is to argue that a consequentialist criterion of rightness requires us to accept a partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure, and that this decision procedure prohibits eating animals, as well as maintaining and supporting systems that confine, kill, and exploit animals as a matter of principle (with certain caveats that we explain). This is centrally because supporting animal agriculture negatively shapes our individual beliefs, values, and practices, and because having a system of animal farming at all negatively shapes our collective beliefs, values, and practices. In both cases, the result is that we tend to have attitudes that devalue animals and practices that harm them.

III.II. The individual effects of animal exploitation

²⁵ As we will note, others have explored this option too, including Fischer (ms), Gruen (2011), and Singer (2011).

We begin with the individual effects of animal exploitation. We here follow the literature in focusing on the psychological effects of eating meat, though we will consider below whether and to what degree these effects apply to other activities that involve exploitation too.

Our argument has two parts. First, theoretical and empirical moral psychology support the idea, originally found in ecofeminist thought, that eating animals leads humans to view animals as having diminished mental life and moral status. When we condone animal agriculture, in word, thought, or deed, we condition ourselves to devalue and, as a result, harm other animals. Second, theoretical and empirical motivational psychology support the idea that so-called “conscientious omnivores” typically fail to be as conscientious as they would like to think. That is, when we adopt a policy of eating happy animals, we will likely end up eating unhappy animals as well. Thus, we will argue, consequentialists should adopt a policy of not eating animals at all (with certain caveats that we discuss).

Part one of our argument – that eating animal products conditions us to see animals as objects rather than subjects – has precedent among consequentialists and nonconsequentialists alike. For example, Peter Singer argues:²⁶

[Practically], it would be better to reject altogether the killing of animals for food, unless one must do so to survive. Killing animals for food makes us think of them as objects that we can use as we please... To foster the right attitudes of consideration for animals... it may be best to make it a simple principle to avoid killing them for food.

²⁶ Singer, 2011, p. 134.

Similarly, Cora Diamond points out that humans reject emphatically the practice of eating our own dead, not because we think that we have a moral duty not to engage in this practice, but rather because we have relationships with and attitudes towards humans in light of which it simply makes no sense to eat them. To eat a human body is to commit a kind of category error. Committing this error expresses a kind of disregard for the miscategorized subject, by placing them in the category of the edible rather than in the category of the personal.

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Building on Diamond's line of argument, Lori Gruen has argued that what is wrong with eating animals is that:²⁸

[I]n turning other animals from living subjects with lives of their own into commodities or consumable objects we have erased their subjectivity and reduced them to things...

[This] forecloses another way of seeing animals, as beings with whom we can empathize and learn to understand and respond to differences.

Finally (though there are other examples too), Carol Adams argues that:²⁹

[M]eat-eating offers the grounds for subjugating animals: if we can kill, butcher, and consume them—in other words, completely annihilate them—we may as well experiment

²⁷ Diamond, 1978, p. 467.

²⁸ Gruen, 2011, p. 103.

²⁹ Adams, 2015, p. 100.

upon them, trap and hunt them, exploit them, and raise them in environments that imprison them, such as factory and fur-bearing animal farms.

Recent psychological research on the so-called “meat paradox” empirically confirms these claims. For example, in a series of five studies, Brock Bastian and colleagues have demonstrated a link between seeing animals as food, on one hand, and seeing animals as having diminished mental lives and moral value, on the other hand. We will here describe three.

In a first study, participants were asked to rate the degree to which each of a diverse group of 32 animals possessed 10 mental capacities, and then were asked how likely they would be to eat the animal and how wrong they believe eating that animal is. Perceived edibility was negatively associated with mind possession ($r = -.42, p < .001$), which was in turn associated with how the perceived wrongness of eating the animal ($r = .80, p < .001$).³⁰

In a second study, participants were asked to eat dried beef or dried nuts and then judge a cow’s cognitive abilities and desert of moral treatment on two seven-point scales. Participants in the beef condition ($M = 5.57$) viewed the cow as significantly less deserving of moral concern than those in the control condition ($M = 6.08$).³¹

In a third study, participants were informed about Papua New Guinea’s tree kangaroo, and informed variably that tree kangaroos have a steady population, that they are killed by storms, that they are killed for food, or that they are foraged for food. Bastian and colleagues found that categorizing tree kangaroos as food and no other features of these cases led participants to attribute less capacity for suffering and less moral concern.³²

³⁰ Bastian et al., 2012, pp. 249-250.

³¹ Loughnan, Haslam, & Bastian, 2010.

³² Bratanova, Loughnan, & Bastian, 2011.

Additionally, a sequence of five studies from Jonas Kunst and Sigrid Hohle demonstrates that processing meat, beheading a whole roasted pig, watching a meat advertisement without a live animal versus one with a live animal, describing meat production as “harvesting” versus “killing” or “slaughtering,” and describing meat as “beef/pork” rather than “cow/pig” all decreased empathy for the animal in question and, in several cases, significantly increased willingness to eat meat rather than an alternative vegetarian dish.³³

Psychologists involved in these and several other studies³⁴ believe that these phenomena occur because people recognize an incongruity between eating animals and seeing them as beings with mental life and moral status, so they are motivated to resolve this cognitive dissonance by lowering their estimation of animal sentience and moral status. Since these affective attitudes influence the decisions we make, eating meat and embracing the idea of animals as food negatively influences our individual and social treatment of nonhuman animals.

Part two of our argument—that eating animal products in exceptional cases makes us likely to eat animal products in ordinary cases—has precedent as well. Recall that a central reason why Hare and other consequentialists support simpler decision procedures is that more complex decision procedures have more adjustable parameters that allow for false rationalization.

Following this line of reasoning, we can predict that a policy of not eating animal products at all will generally be better than a policy of eating animal products only in narrowly-circumscribed contexts. Self-identified “conscientious omnivores” who claim to eat animal products only in circumstances where farmed animals have positive well-being are likely to eat animal products in circumstances where farmed animals have negative well-being as well.

³³ Kunst & Hohle, 2016.

³⁴ Buttlar & Walther, 2019.

In particular, they are likely to rationalize eating animal products not only on the grounds that animals experience diminished pain or have diminished moral status, but also on other grounds, such as that they are at a family dinner, that a particular restaurant probably has ethical practices, or even that a particular item on the menu looks appealing.

Here, again, psychological research supports armchair theory. A 2015 study revealed that “conscientious omnivores” were less likely than vegetarians to perceive their diet as something that they needed to follow. They reported violating their diet more, feeling less guilty when doing so, feeling less disgusted by factory-farmed meat, and believing less in animal rights, among other findings.³⁵ Moreover, diet had a statistically significant effect on all measures independent of whether the diet was motivated by health or ethical reasons. Whether one is a vegetarian or a conscientious omnivore appears to change one’s psychological relationship to meat and to meat-eating, with implications for how consistently one applies one’s policy. Note also that these self-reports are unlikely to capture cases in which individuals see themselves as complying with their policy when they are in fact violating it, or cases in which individuals see themselves as violating their policy but would rather not admit that.

We are now in a position to see that, even if an individual might be morally permitted to be a “conscientious omnivore” rather than a vegetarian in principle (i.e., in cases that idealize away facts about human psychology), most individuals have strong (in our view decisive) reason not to be “conscientious omnivores” rather than vegetarians in practice (i.e., in cases that do not idealize away facts about human psychology). Because of the indirect effects of conforming to a policy of eating animals sometimes, a policy of not eating animals at all will do more good

³⁵ Rothgerber, 2015.

overall. Thus, consequentialists have strong (in our view decisive) reason to adopt a policy of not eating animals at all, except perhaps in highly exceptional cases where doing so clearly does more good than harm. More generally, we have strong (in our view decisive) reason to adopt a policy of supporting beliefs, values, and practices that treat animals as subjects rather than as objects, and that cultivate relationships of care rather than exploitation with them.

III.III. The social effects of animal exploitation

We now consider the social effects of animal exploitation. (Here we focus on the social effects of systems of animal exploitation themselves, though we believe that individual support for these systems can have social effects too.)³⁶ Once again, our argument has a dual structure, taking the impact of animal farming on human attitudes as one premise and our skepticism about the possibility of restricting ourselves to net positive versions of this practice as another.

Our central contention is that, because animal agriculture is necessarily a system of institutionalized violence against nonhuman animals, the existence of any such system will tend to socially perpetuate a speciesist ideological orientation towards nonhuman animals, diminishing the moral status that society predicates to them. This will, in turn, lead to both systematic violations of compliance with the standards of farming which LARDER requires and to other harmful actions regarding nonhuman animals and other sentient beings.

Animal farming serves as the grounds of its own ideological justification. The very fact that animal farming exists makes us more likely to see it as acceptable, in part by providing us

³⁶ For discussion of the social effects of individual support for systems of animal exploitation, see Schlottmann & Sebo, 2018, Chapter 9.

with evidence that other people see it as acceptable. Moreover, the idea that humans can treat nonhumans as we do in animal farming provides an inferential justification for all kinds of other practices and attitudes, including complacency with other systems of nonhuman exploitation and with wild animal suffering. Finally, the production of agricultural imagery—which typically obscures rather than illuminates the realities of animal agriculture because it is funded by industry—establishes animal agriculture as a legitimate and permanent institution.³⁷

The idea that a harmful or oppressive system can serve as its own ideological justification is not new. Many people have made this point before, not only in the context of animal rights advocacy but also in the context of human rights advocacy. For example, in her work on prison abolitionism, Angela Davis argues that images of the prison system foster complacency with incarceration. In particular, Davis argues that media productions, especially in Hollywood, make the prison one of the “most important features of our image environment.”³⁸

This has caused us to take the existence of prisons for granted. The prison has become a key ingredient of our common sense. It is there, all around us. We do not question whether it should exist. It has become so much a part of our lives that it requires a great feat of the imagination to envision life beyond the prison.

Despite our constant consumption of prisons, the “realities of imprisonment are hidden from almost all who have not had the misfortune of doing time.”³⁹ Cultural images of prisons obscure rather than illuminate the realities of the prison system, all while impressing upon us the

³⁷ Cf. Piazza et al., 2015; Gruen, 2014.

³⁸ Davis, 2011, pp. 18-19.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

necessity, naturalness, and permanence of an expansive system of incarceration. Meanwhile, the prison system functions to racialize punishment, associating Blackness with criminality and with punishment.⁴⁰

Many social and legal theorists believe that the law is similar, in that a central mechanism through which the law yields conformity is by shaping perceived group norms and attitudes, thereby anchoring human moral attitudes and behavior.⁴¹ The law performs this function both directly and indirectly. It performs this function directly when members of a society can infer from changing laws that a certain number of people must support the proposed norm. It performs this function indirectly when members of society view other members following the law, and infer that others must endorse the norm which the law enforces.⁴²

The upshot is that the system of animal agriculture, as well as the current legal status of animal agriculture, work together to socially legitimize this system. They both shape perceived group norms, anchoring our moral attitudes and behaviors. Members of a society can infer from the fact that the system of animal agriculture is legal in that society that most people in that society support confining, killing, and eating animals (and are right to do so). If so, then a legal system of animal agriculture works in multiple ways to justify its own existence, as well as to inferiorize nonhuman animals.

The importance of these effects should not be understated. As some effective altruists argue, some of the very most important interventions that we can perform to improve the total value of the world are aimed at “moral circle expansion.” To aim for moral circle expansion is to aim for a wider range of sentient beings to receive moral consideration over time. The idea here

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 22-39.

⁴¹ Bilz & Nadler, 2009; Flores & Barclay, 2015; Tankard & Paluck, 2016; Tankard & Paluck, 2017.

⁴² Bilz and Nadler, 2009, p. 104.

is that the values of future generations will make a vast difference to the value of the future—for example, it could change whether these people will support or resist protections for domesticated animals, wild animals, or even digital beings.⁴³ Thus, if institutionalized animal agriculture is an obstacle in the way of moral circle expansion, removing this obstacle should be a central moral priority for consequentialists.

Next, notice that a society that maintains a system of animal agriculture in the narrow contexts in which this system is a net benefit for farmed animals will doubtfully be able to contain its farming practices to these contexts. In countries with developed, industrialized economies, animal agriculture manages to produce animal products at scale only by producing them at very low cost to industry. This in turn requires industry to adopt very minimal space requirements, veterinary care, and regulation and oversight, while using genetically modified species whose rapid growth, reproductive efficiency, and hormonal excesses leave them chronically ill and in pain. A system of animal agriculture that provides farmed animals with positive well-being would require drastic revisions to all of these features of animal agriculture, each significantly raising the economic costs of production. While we cannot here build a quantitative model, suffice it to say that we are highly skeptical of the possibility of building a system of animal farming that both benefits farmed animals and feeds anyone beyond the very wealthiest humans.

These concerns might not fully apply to subsistence animal farming with dramatically lower stocking density in countries without developed, industrialized economies. But while this system of animal farming might be able to maintain animal welfare standards conducive to the

⁴³ For more on the overwhelming importance of shaping the far future for determining right action for consequentialists, see Beckstead (2013) and Greaves & MacAskill (ms).

LARDER over the short term, capitalist selective pressures may eventually favor the development of industrial systems of animal farming to which our concerns will apply fully. Thus, perhaps barring rare cases where animal products are nutritionally mandated, it is plausible that consequentialists should endorse a policy of not farming animals anywhere. With that said, our focus in this chapter is on animal farming in the context of developed, industrialized economies, and so we will not try to argue for this more general policy here.

The upshot of these discussions is that consequentialists have strong reason to reject LARDER at the level of decision procedure. In particular, we should accept principles which forbid increasing and require decreasing the population of farmed animals, and which forbid eating animals and otherwise supporting the idea that animals are food in all but the most exceptional cases. To be clear about the structure of our argument, what these considerations do is raise the moral costs of meat-eating and animal farming. We think that these costs are sufficiently high that the benefits of positive well-being for some farmed animals do not outweigh the costs in all but the most fanciful cases. Once we combine the indirect considerations that we have discussed here with the direct considerations that we discussed above (about the expected animal welfare, public health, and environmental impacts of animal agriculture in the real world), the case for abolition of animal agriculture becomes even stronger.

As with any decision procedure, this partly consequentialist, partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure is likely to produce at least some blameless wrongdoing. While eating animals and performatively condoning animal farming will ordinarily be harmful, they might sometimes be beneficial. Moreover, while we might sometimes clearly see when we are in an exceptional case where this is beneficial, we will not always clearly see that. But this is fine.

Since no one short of an archangel has the psychological capacity to act optimifically in every choice situation, the best we can do is identify the governing policies that minimize expected wrongdoing over the long run. Our view is that for most people in most situations, this partly consequentialist, partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure does exactly that.

We should note three caveats about our argument here. First, we are not sure to what degree the social and psychological impacts of meat production and consumption extend to other forms of animal use, including the use of animals for eggs, dairy, clothing, research, entertainment, and companionship. We predict that these social and psychological impacts will be strongest in the case of meat production and consumption, but that they will at least be present in the context of other forms of harmful or oppressive use. At the limit, there will be instances of use such as the consumption of plastics made from animal byproducts that are so psychologically divorced from animal use that they may have no individual psychological impacts at all. But this is an empirical hypothesis that requires empirical investigation.

Second, as with any empirical psychological findings, we are not sure to what degree there may be variation in the attitudes toward farmed animals and other sentient beings that people form as a result of consuming animal products and living in a society that uses animals for food. Thus, we are not sure to what degree there is variation in the decision procedures that will help people to maximize net pleasure in the world, given these psychological impacts. The psychological effects that we have discussed in this section appear to be robust, but we should not expect this to be a human psychological universal. Note that since we cannot typically assess our own levels of bias introspectively, we should all assume that we are likely to be subject to the biases described.

Third, we are not sure to what degree there might be exceptional cases where meat production and consumption is morally permissible or required at the decision procedure level. We can at least imagine cases where producing or consuming meat would clearly be optimal, such that we should suspend animal rights that we normally regard as absolute. But note that such a case would have to be truly exceptional, i.e., it would have to be the kind of case that might warrant suspending human rights as well. Other than cases where people need to produce or consume meat to survive (which are not as common as “conscientious omnivores” think, though they do occur), we expect that such cases will be rare, though we cannot say for sure.

Many people criticize animal advocates for focusing too much on consumer action and not enough on other kinds of political action. We agree with this criticism, which is part of why we recommend advocacy that aims not only at individual consumer change but also at social, political, economic, and technological change. However, we also think that individual consumer change is more important than some critics realize. When we distance ourselves from systems of violence, we are able to see these systems for what they are, and to find the motivation to resist them in other ways.

IV. Wild animals and the logic of the logger

IV.I. Background

The idea that consequentialists should aim to conserve wild animal populations, all else being equal, relies on the assumption that wild animals generally have positive well-being. And,

it makes sense that people would make this assumption. After all, wild animals do experience positive well-being in their lives. They enjoy food, sex, play, relationships, and a range of comforting solitary and interpersonal experiences.

However, some consequentialists believe that wild animals have negative well-being. Granted, they might have ample opportunity for positive experience. But they also face ample risk of negative experience, resulting from hunger, thirst, illness, injury, predation, and more. Moreover, most wild animals are small animals who are members of “r-selected” species. Such animals achieve population equilibrium by giving birth to very many offspring with extremely high mortality rates. Oscar Horta offers the example of Atlantic Cods, who maintain population equilibrium by spawning around two million eggs per year, only one of which, on average, will reach adulthood. Thus, the vast majority of wild animals who exist, assuming they are sentient, have very short, painful lives that consist mainly of dying.

Such observations have led many commentators to note that if most wild animals have negative well-being, then the world could be improved simply by ending the lives of these animals and destroying their habitats, an argument which we have titled “The Logic of the Logger” (LOGGER). For example, effective altruist blogger Brian Tomasik argues that “[g]iven that most wild animals that are born have net-negative experiences, loss of wildlife habitat should in general be encouraged rather than opposed.”⁴⁴ Whereas people like Yew-Kwang Ng encourage “extreme caution before we do anything that may disturb the biosphere,”⁴⁵ Tomasik argues that such caution is unwarranted, and encourages us to adopt a strong “anti-conservationist” stance.

⁴⁴ Tomasik, 2017A.

⁴⁵ Ng, 1995.

The idea here is that if consequentialism is true, and if wild animals have negative well-being, then there is a *pro tanto* moral reason to promote a world that excludes these wild animals instead of a world that includes them. This might mean that we have *pro tanto* moral reasons to engage in hunting, fishing, and as Tomasik argues, activities aimed at “decreasing plant growth and entirely eliminating wilderness.” Some defenders of the Logic of the Logger further suppose that these moral reasons are ultimately undefeated, such that, all-things-considered, consequentialists ought to engage in such anti-conservationist activities.

As with LARDER, LOGGER makes conservative assumptions about population axiology. It assumes only that it is not *bad* for there to be fewer wild animals with negative well-being. While there are population axiologies that sometimes deny this, such as averageism and some impartial forms of egalitarianism, the claim that it is not bad for there to be fewer sentient beings with negative well-being is a highly plausible desideratum for population axiology.

Because LOGGER is a very new argument, discussed mostly on internet blogs and in op-eds, few philosophers have commented on the issue. Those who have commented have made similar responses to LOGGER as to LARDER.⁴⁶ In particular, they have replied by rejecting consequentialism, by rejecting the idea that consequentialism supports reducing wild animal populations, and by accepting the idea that consequentialism supports this. Especially important have been arguments that (a) wild animals do not clearly experience net negative well-being,⁴⁷ and (b) the possibility of unpredictable trophic cascades makes it difficult if not impossible to identify habitat destruction methods that will do more good than harm overall.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Singer, 2011; Tomasik, 2017A.

⁴⁷ Groff & Ng, 2019.

⁴⁸ Delon & Purves, 2018.

As with LARDER, we are sympathetic with all of these replies. However, we think that we should accept these replies only on a consequentialist interpretation, and that when we do, we will see that there is a deeper reason for consequentialists to reject LOGGER, i.e., that even treating LOGGER as an open question is likely to be a net harm for nonhuman animals and other sentient beings in practice, for precisely the reasons that lead people to reject consequentialism.

Our aim in what follows, then, is to argue that, for a variety of reasons, a consequentialist criterion of rightness requires us to accept a partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure, and that this decision procedure conflicts with destroying animals and ecosystems at present (with certain caveats that we will explain). In particular, it requires us to place significant weight on protecting wild animal autonomy, cultivating virtuous character traits toward wild animals, and cultivating relationships of care with wild animals. This is centrally because exterminating animals negatively shapes our individual beliefs, values, and practices, and because living without wild animals altogether negatively shapes our collective beliefs, values, and practices. As above, in both cases, the result is that we tend to have attitudes that devalue animals and practices that harm them. However, we want to emphasize that we are less confident about how to evaluate LOGGER than about how to evaluate LARDER, for reasons that we will explain below.

IV.II. The individual effects of animal extermination

We begin with the individual effects of animal extermination. We here focus on the individual effects of activities such as hunting, fishing, logging, and land development for human use, though we will consider below whether and to what degree these effects apply to other activities that reduce wild animal populations too.

Our argument has two parts, which in many ways parallel the argument against LARDER. First, we contend that participating in standard forms of extermination conditions humans to view animals as expendable, as inferior, and ultimately as having diminished moral status relative to humans. That is, when we performatively condone the killing of animals, directly or indirectly, in a way that treats these animals as mere means and undermines their agency, we condition ourselves to devalue and, as a result, harm other animals. Second, the more we open ourselves up to engaging in such practices in cases where they are a net benefit, the more willing we will be to support and engage in such practices in cases where they are not. Thus, we will argue, consequentialists should adopt a policy of not destroying animals and ecosystems by these means at all (with certain caveats that we will discuss).

Our first argument against LARDER focused centrally on two empirically-validated social-psychological phenomena. First is the point that meat-eating creates psychological dissonance in people which they resolve by attributing lower mental life and moral status to nonhuman animals. Second is the closely-related point that when people observe meat-eating, they infer that the people eating meat do not think that nonhuman animals are minded beings with moral standing. In our view, the best explanation for these findings is that people have at least partly deontological moral intuitions. If nonhuman animals have sentience and moral standing, they must be the kinds of beings who it is wrong to kill, eat, and exploit for human

benefit. But since, the meat-eater judges, I and others *do* kill, eat, and exploit animals for human benefit, they must not have sentience and moral standing.

If many people have these kinds of moral intuitions, then we can predict that participating in the destruction of wild animals and their habitats will have similar consequences as participating in animal agriculture (again, covarying with the degree and kind of participation). That is, we can predict that this activity would cultivate within us an ideology of human supremacism (again, covarying with the degree and kind of participation). All of us have internalized deeply the idea that humans are the kinds of beings with whom we should have relationships of care, and that such relationships do not involve the kinds of violence and agency denial that is central to practices of hunting, fishing, and habitat destruction. Participating in these practices, then, creates differential psychological constructs regarding humans and other animals. Because we have also internalized the idea that building relationships of care with others is morally important, this may well lead us to accept that our relationships with other animals are not as morally important as our relationships with other humans.

Brian Tomasik has argued explicitly against this kind of reasoning, urging us to help now and cultivate attitudes and relationships of care later.⁴⁹ Tomasik invites us to consider:

[W]hat kinds of values are we trying to promote within society? Are we trying to promote the idea of holding back on doing the right thing because of how others may misinterpret it? ... I think the ideology question isn't settled, because there's also value in challenging prevailing assumptions in the animal movement and promoting a culture of

⁴⁹ Tomasik, 2016. Cf. Tomasik, 2017B.

compassionate consequentialism, which could reduce the likelihood that the animal movement neglects huge sources of suffering in the future in the way it currently neglects... wild-animal suffering.

We agree with Tomasik that consequentialists should aim to cultivate and promote the virtues of responding with urgency and calculated efficiency to the suffering of nonhuman sentient beings. This may well require intervening to improve the welfare of wild animals sooner rather than later. But we nevertheless disagree with Tomasik on two significant points.

First, while consequentialists should cultivate virtues of urgency and efficiency, and while doing so sometimes conflicts with cultivating relationships of care, we believe that these activities are for the most part complementary. For example, if we aspire to respect wild animal life and autonomy while benefiting wild animals as much as possible within these constraints, such as by aiding them with medical intervention, reducing human and domesticated animal predation, and researching effective interventions into wild animal suffering, we can cultivate and promote anti-speciesist ideology and a concern for urgency and efficiency at the same time.

Second, consequentialists should be concerned about cultivating relationships of care with nonhuman animals not only because others are liable to misinterpret altruistic murders⁵⁰ as speciesist, but also because we are liable to reinforce speciesism within ourselves and others whether or not we are misinterpreting our behavior as speciesist. The issue here is that participation in destroying animals and their environments would condition us to see them as having less sentience and moral standing independently of how we interpret our behavior.

⁵⁰ An elegant expression credited to Ricardo Torres (2015).

Granted, some interpretations might cause this effect to be larger than others. But we are suggesting that the effect would be present either way.

One aspect of our argument against LARDER focused on the observation that complex decision procedures have adjustable parameters that allow for false rationalization. We think that this consideration supports establishing deontological, virtue theoretic, and care theoretic constraints on our utilitarian activity for domesticated animals and wild animals alike. In short, consequentialists should adopt decision procedures which *pro tanto* prohibit harming or killing nonhuman animals merely as means to further ends for much the same reason they should do so in the case of humans: The more we engage in such practices in anything other than clearly exceptional cases, the more willing we will be to engage in such practices in a wide range of cases that do not plausibly benefit wild animals.

In light of these considerations, we find it plausible that, even if an individual might be morally permitted to altruistically engage in wild animal extermination and habitat destruction in principle (i.e., in cases that idealize away facts about human psychology), most individuals are not morally permitted to take these actions in practice (i.e., in cases that do not idealize away facts about human psychology). Given the negative indirect effects of a policy of participating in the destruction of animals and habitats sometimes, a policy of not participating at all will do more good overall. Thus, ordinary consequentialists should instead adopt a policy of not participating at all, except perhaps in highly exceptional cases where doing so clearly does more good than harm.

With that said, we ultimately agree with Tomasik that these questions are unsettled. How we should resolve LOGGER will depend on our answers to many questions, especially questions

about wild animal well-being and population ethics. Given how many wild animals there are, we are open to the possibility that the value of reducing their suffering via habitat destruction outweighs the value of reducing suffering more generally by cultivating virtues and relationships of care. For that reason, we are not claiming that LOGGER fails, but are rather claiming that it fails at present given our current epistemic state (which includes uncertainty about how much well-being wild animals have at present and could have in the future). On our best judgment, consequentialists should focus for now on helping wild animals in ways that respect their lives and autonomy, and on laying the groundwork for respectful, compassionate, and effective systematic interventions to reduce wild animal suffering in the future, as we will now discuss.

IV.III. The social effects of animal extermination

We now consider the social effects of exterminating animals. (As above, we focus on the social effects of systems of animal extermination themselves, though we believe that individual support for these systems can have social effects too.) In this case, we must consider not only the social effects of living in a world with legally sanctioned destruction of wild animals and habitats, but also the social effects of living in the world that this activity would bring about. Since our analysis of the former effects are easier to infer from our above discussion than our analysis of the latter effects, we will focus on the latter effects here.

In particular, we will focus on three possible ways of structuring society: living with wild animals, living without wild animals (or at least, living with fewer wild animals) via domestication, and living without wild animals (or at least, living with fewer wild animals) via

extinction. Of course, in focusing on these options, we are not suggesting that they are exhaustive, since various combinations are possible as well. We suggest only that an initial focus on these options helps us to see clearly some of the relevant considerations.

Our argument has two parts. First, we contend that each alternative arrangement has its own ideological costs and benefits, significantly determining the possible relationships we could have with sentient beings in the future. Second, pursuing the best version of each arrangement is no guarantee that we will achieve that version, and we may instead be left with a warped version that looks more like a dystopian version of the status quo.

Consider first the effect that learning to live with wild animals might have. In the best case, we could learn to live with wild animals in a radical new way, respecting their lives and autonomy while intervening into their affairs to improve their well-being. This approach has the advantage of being more achievable than other approaches we will discuss. It would challenge human supremacism, producing an ideology of respect and compassion for sentient beings and teaching us lessons about co-existence and cooperation.⁵¹ However, this approach would likely leave unaddressed some of the most significant sources of wild animal suffering, such as predation and r-selection.

Of course, there is a non-trivial chance that, if we choose to live with wild animals, we would not realize this best-case scenario. As Tomasik argues, it would be easy for us to slide back into our current state of indifference. In this case, we would neither improve the lives of wild animals nor challenge our current ideological presuppositions about wild animals and other sentient nonhuman beings. Our relationship with wild animals would continue to be one of

⁵¹ Gruen, 2015.

mystery and awe, but also of alterity and indifference, characterized by the belief that wild animals should be left alone except where their human interests can be served by interfering with their lives. While learning to live with wild animals raises the quasi-utopian possibility of forming radical relationships of respect, compassion, co-existence, and assistance, it also raises the dystopian possibility of leaving the status quo forever intact.

Consider second the effect that learning to live without wild animals (or at least, living with fewer wild animals) via domestication might have. In the best case, we could domesticate wild animals by pursuing radical forms of sanctuary that look little like the current status quo for domesticated animals. Such forms of sanctuary would parentalistically give humans control over the forms of life wild animals could pursue, but would also be as deferential as possible to the revealed preferences of these animals. This system would provide wild animals with much higher levels of well-being on average, and it would also disrupt human supremacist ideology by teaching us lessons of care, responsibility, and stewardship. At the same time, it would be costly to develop and maintain, and it would risk reinforcing a diminished view of animal agency.

Again, there is a non-trivial chance that, if we choose to domesticate wild animals, we would not realize this best-case scenario. If advocates pursued the domestication of wild animals but without challenging our assumptions of human superiority, or if we continued to pursue conservation through our current frameworks, this could lead us to impose on wild animals the status quo for animals living under human domestication, e.g., confining wild animals in zoos. This system would provide domesticated wild animals with relatively low well-being, and it might also reinforce much the same ideology as zoos, teaching us “a false sense of our place in

the natural order.”⁵² While domesticating wild animals raises the quasi-utopian possibility of forming radical relationships of care, responsibility, and stewardship, it also raises the dystopian possibility of imposing the current status quo for domesticated animals on a much higher proportion of sentient beings than we currently do.

Consider finally the effect that learning to live without wild animals (or at least, living with fewer wild animals) via extinction would have on human ideology. In the best case, we could bring about the extinction of wild animals through deliberate and cautious intervention that minimizes wild animal suffering and respects wild animal agency as much as possible. This would result in a world with little to no wild animal suffering. It may also teach us lessons of care for the suffering of sentient beings as well as lessons of caution about the hazards inherent in the very existence of sentient life. However, it also risks reinforcing the harmful idea that we should respond to the suffering of others (human and nonhuman alike) by seeking to control or eliminate the sufferers rather than by helping to reduce or eliminate their suffering.⁵³

Once again, there is a non-trivial chance that, if we choose to bring about the extinction of wild animals, we would not realize this best-case scenario. For if advocates push for the extinction of wild animals without challenging our assumptions of human superiority, we could bring about the extinction of wild animals through the means that have come to be the status quo: incautiously destroying wild animal habitats through hunting, fishing, development, and more. This might still lead to a world with no wild animal suffering. However, it would also reinforce our ideology of human supremacism, teaching us that nonhuman animals are not deserving of the

⁵² Jamieson, 1985.

⁵³ This oppressive idea can harm humans as well. For example, in cases where people with mental and physical difference are suffering, many people see this suffering as a reason to reduce mental and physical difference in the world, rather than as a reason to create a world that can accommodate mental and physical difference. For more on this subject, see Foucault (1988), Mitchell-Brody & Sebo (ms), and Taylor (2017).

same kind of respect as human beings. Moreover, such a radically incautious process of total annihilation would leave a trail of immense suffering in its wake, with many wild animals dying slow and painful deaths of deprivation.

As we can see, all three of these possible futures carry costs and benefits, both directly (via our impact on wild animals) and indirectly (via our impact on human ideology). This is true for both the ideal and the non-ideal versions of these possible futures.

It can be tempting to draw a strong conclusion on the basis of these considerations, but our view is that these considerations are far too preliminary to support such conclusions. After all, we remain highly uncertain about the experiences of wild animals, about the feasibility of each system, about the costs and opportunity costs of pursuing each system, and much more.

It can also be tempting not to draw a conclusion at all, instead urging caution until we have much more information. But we must remember that a precautionary approach is, in practice, a choice to maintain a status quo that involves the continuing suffering of possibly septillions of sentient beings.

All things considered, our own weakly held view is that we should wait to take systematic action. If advocates invest resources in building capacity for research on reducing wild animal suffering and advocacy for the moral and political standing of wild animals, then we will likely be much better able to take informed and effective action in a few decades than we are now.⁵⁴ At present, we are not yet willing to take large scale action for the sake of wild animals, and even if we were, we are not yet able to take such action without destabilizing the entire biosphere. Granted, playing the long game carries the cost of preserving the status quo in the

⁵⁴ Cf. Schubert and Garfinkel, 2017.

short term. However, this cost is relatively minor compared to the epistemic and practical resources we can expect to gain through research and advocacy, given how few resources we have at the present time.

To be clear about the structure of our argument, what these social psychological considerations do is raise the moral costs of destroying wild animals and ecosystems. We think that these expected costs are sufficiently high that the expected benefit of eliminating negative well-being in wild animals does not outweigh them. Once we combine this consideration with the considerations that we discussed above (about our uncertainty about the total welfare of wild animals and the unpredictable consequences of intervention), the case for adopting a quasi-conservationist ethic becomes even stronger.

As above, this partly consequentialist, partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure is likely to result in at least some blameless wrongdoing. There might be some cases where destroying wild animals and habitats is best, and where we are not in a position to see that an exception is warranted. But again, this is fine. No decision procedure is perfect, and our suggestion is only that this partly consequentialist, partly nonconsequentialist decision procedure is best for most people in most situations at present.

We should stress that our argument is tentative. We are suggesting that LOGGER fails at present, given our current information state. Consequentialists have strong (in our view decisive) reason to reject LOGGER for now, and to instead accept principles which forbid destroying wild animals and ecosystems in all but the most exceptional cases. To be clear, we can imagine changing our minds with more information. For example, if we come to think that the aggregate well-being of wild animals is bad enough that the harm of allowing them to exist clearly

outweighs the harm (both to wild animals and to other sentient beings) of cultivating and promoting human supremacist beliefs, values, and practices, we might come to think that LOGGER succeeds. However, we are currently skeptical that we will reach this conclusion.

V. Conclusion: Future technology, future directions

Antispeciesist consequentialists and nonconsequentialists can agree that factory farming and wild animal welfare are two of the very highest-priority areas on which to spend scarce resources. However, many have supposed that consequentialists and nonconsequentialists are forced to disagree about the means of helping farmed animals and wild animals. Defenders of the Logic of the Larder have argued that consequentialism sometimes requires eating farmed animals in order to ensure that animals with positive well-being exist, while defenders of the Logic of the Logger have argued that consequentialism sometimes requires destroying wild animals and ecosystems in order to ensure that animals with negative well-being do not exist. In this chapter, we have argued that the Logic of the Larder and the Logic of the Logger both underestimate the importance of indirect decision procedures. In particular, they underestimate the role that our individual and collective policies play in shaping our moral attitudes and behavior and they underestimate the importance of accepting policies that are robust against harmful deviation. Once we have properly accounted for these considerations, it is clear that the Logic of the Larder fails and it is unclear that the Logic of the Logger succeeds.

We can expect future technological change to bring with it new and immense challenges for consequentialist moral theorists and advocates. Where the variety and number of farmed

animals and wild animals have raised cluelessness and demandingness challenges for consequentialism, future sentient beings such as artificially intelligent minds will introduce even more varied and numerous minds into the world, thereby exacerbating these challenges even further. As a result, we can expect these advances to raise many new and difficult questions about the practical implications of consequentialism and about its deviation from nonconsequentialism. If we are wise, we will begin to develop and answer some of these questions now, before we have another moral tragedy the scale of factory farming or wild animal suffering on our hands. It will be difficult to know, in advance, what kinds of future sentient beings might exist as technology continues to advance with increasingly accelerating returns, or when we will even recognize these sentient beings *as* sentient beings. But for precisely these reasons, we need to begin, now, to determine how consequentialism requires us to act in the face of such massive uncertainty, and we must work to identify, now, the indirect decision heuristics that will guide us away from moral dystopia before it arrives, rather than responding to it once it is already here.

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