


long prior to his flirtations with Bentham. One cannot disagree with Crimmins when he says that it is ‘difficult to fathom what experience triggered Cooper’s startling change of heart and mind’ when he ‘firmly pinned his colours’ to slavery and to racial pseudo-science. These two chapters show what Crimmins summarises in the ensuing ‘Epilogue’, namely how utilitarianism and its application can be enlisted in ways unpalatable to us now.

The text concludes with an epilogue concerning what the author calls the ‘Pragmatic Impulse’ in American philosophy, characterised by a ‘stress on the practical’, and a ‘climate of opinion that esteemed ... self-sufficiency, the entrepreneurial spirit and material acquisition’. Utilitarianism, says Crimmins, ‘was eminently suited to this ethos’. Utilitarianism was readily drawn upon to ‘legitimise its central preoccupations’. Utilitarians were used either as points of departure for the recommendations of many American thinkers or as a ‘means of sharpening and advancing’ their ideas. This cross-fertilization of utilitarianism with American pragmatism illustrates, for Crimmins, the substantive ways in which the ideas of utilitarianism’s ‘American fellow travellers’ affected it and suggests too that American liberalism cannot properly be considered without due attention paid to the relationship between utilitarianism and pragmatism. Overall, Crimmins’s work makes a valuable contribution to the history of utilitarian moral and political thought, and it provides excellent insight into its American origins and development as well as its successes and failings there.

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## Catia Faria, *Animal Ethics in the Wild: Wild Animal Suffering and Intervention in Nature*

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Questions about animals have been mainstream in ethics since the 1970s and Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation*. But, for decades, wild animal suffering was something of an embarrassment for animal ethicists. With only a few exceptions (Steve Sapontzis comes to mind), animal ethicists avoided talking about the harms that animals face in the wild. When it did come up, critics used it as a *reductio* of the pro-animal position. The animal liberationist, the critic pressed, was committed to absurd-sounding conclusions about protecting wild animals from their wild predators, feeding wild animals who went hungry, and providing healthcare for every wild animal on the planet.

Thought about in this way, it was the animal ethicist’s job to come up with an explanation of how the liberationist position commits us to, for example, veganism, while at the same time not committing us to meddling in ecosystems. But this framing is starting to sound old-fashioned. Through work from philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, Jeff McMahan, Oscar Horta, and Kyle Johannsen – plus organizations

like Wild Animal Initiative and Animal Ethics – the idea that, contrary to initial expectations, we should intervene in nature to reduce wild animal suffering is now an established possibility.

It is against this background that Catia Faria's *Animal Ethics in the Wild* emerges. It is not the first book-length case for intervention in nature (that title probably goes to Johannsen's 2021 *Wild Animal Ethics*), but it is surely the most detailed.

*Animal Ethics in the Wild* is neither a manifesto nor a how-to. The book has the precise, rigorous, systematic, and dispassionate character of an extended philosophical argument. Faria is undoubtedly a deeply capable philosopher who is intimately familiar with this topic.

The book begins with a case for intervention. First, 'suffering is bad' (p. 1). Second, if we can prevent bad things, then – obvious caveats aside – we should do so. There is suffering in nature, and we could minimize it. So we are obliged to intervene in nature.

Most of the book focuses on categorizing and responding to challenges to this simple argument.

To begin, however, Faria addresses the moral considerability of animals (chapter 1) and the concept of speciesism (chapter 2), which, rather surprisingly, she claims is 'strikingly overlooked' (p. 34). These analyses are proficient and up-to-date.

In chapter 3, Faria addresses wild animal suffering head-on. Death, she argues, can be a proxy for suffering in measurements of aggregate wellbeing. Wild animals frequently die in ways that cause them suffering, and if they die while young, they have had little time for positive experiences (pp. 60–1).

Indeed, she believes that most animals 'experience more suffering than positive wellbeing in their lives', and that suffering 'likely predominates over wellbeing in the wild' (p. 63). This is bold. But I suspect Faria ultimately does not need this claim. Suffering 'may not prevail in nature' even while 'our reasons to reduce it [remain] very strong' (p. 64).

In either case, let us turn to the objections that Faria explores.

A *perversity* objection to intervention holds that intervention will *increase* wild animal suffering. A *futility* objection holds that intervention will *fail to reduce* wild animal suffering. Faria responds to both (chapter 4) with an elegant argument called the reversal test:

[W]hen a proposal to change a certain parameter is thought to have bad overall consequences, consider a change to the same parameter in the opposite direction. If this is also thought to have bad overall consequences, then the onus is on those who reach these conclusions to explain why our position cannot be improved by changes to this parameter. If they are unable to do so, then we have reason to suspect that they suffer from a status quo bias. (p. 93, quoting Nick Bostrom and Toby Ord)

Would anti-interventionists appealing to perversity or futility oppose an intervention if it was our aim to increase suffering? If so, Faria says, they seem to be exhibiting a status quo bias. On the other hand, if these hypothetical anti-interventionists would not oppose intervention given this alternative aim, then they accept that we can change things in nature. Consequently, we would need a good explanation of why we could not reduce suffering, too, given the right intervention. (Voltairean quips about living in the best of all possible worlds aside, it is hard to imagine a compelling argument that the status quo involves the lowest possible level of suffering.)

A jeopardy objection (chapter 5) holds that we should not intervene in nature to reduce suffering because doing so will jeopardize non-suffering-based values. Faria

claims that 'jeopardy advocates' will have to show that '(i) the status quo is optimal regarding the promotion of [jeopardized] values and that (ii) we have stronger reasons to promote [jeopardized] values than the reasons we have to promote wild animal well-being' (pp. 104–5). But this is too strong. The jeopardy advocate could remain neutral on the optimality of the status quo regarding the jeopardized value but argue that the damage done by intervention to the jeopardized value is enough to oppose intervention.

Nonetheless, Faria responds to a range of broadly 'environmental' challenges (drawing on holistic values, biocentric values, and the value of 'nature') that might justify non-intervention on jeopardy grounds, finding them wanting. Her arguments do not depend on rejecting the values in question. If we accept that these values provide all-things-considered reasons not to intervene, she says, we must either (1) reject intervention to alleviate wild animal suffering on speciesist grounds; or (2) we must embrace unpalatable conclusions about ignoring human suffering (specifically, when alleviating said suffering would conflict with the environmental value in question). I suspect some advocates of environmental values will bite one (or both) of these bullets. But Faria is right about the need for this bullet-biting, and that should give anyone drawn to jeopardy objections (grounded in environmental values) reason to pause.

Relationality is the next objection Faria addresses. Roughly, relationalists say that (1) we have *general* obligations not to harm animals; (2) duties (or permissions) to assist animals are *special* obligations; (3) we do not have the relationship with *wild* animals that grounds the given special obligations (in a given circumstance). For me, these relational arguments – as defended by Clare Palmer in ethics, or Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in politics – are some of the most interesting and compelling responses to the pro-intervention case.

Faria does a good job of identifying tensions in Palmer's relationalism, but ultimately leans strongly on an external critique: 'any view that does not require an agent to benefit others even when that comes at no cost' – and Faria believes this is a characteristic of Palmer's view – 'is hardly acceptable' (p. 132). But this gives us an easy route to rejecting Faria's conclusions. If someone is willing to reject the view that we have a duty to benefit 'distant' others, even when doing so has little cost to us, they do seem to be able to escape Faria's conclusions. (Of course, this likely is not a position open to consequentialists.)

Faria's objection to Donaldson and Kymlicka's relationalism is clever. Donaldson and Kymlicka are, on the whole, non-interventionists. But their zoopolitical approach does require us, in certain circumstances, to (Faria's words) 'attend to wild animals' needs' (p. 136). But this should not amount, Faria argues, to preserving nature, insofar as nature is very bad for wild animals. Instead, it should require us to engage in 'environmental enhancement', modifying 'natural environmental conditions' to produce 'a net positive effect on the well-being of sentient individuals' (pp. 136–7). Perhaps, then, an advocate of Donaldson and Kymlicka's zoopolitics should, despite Donaldson and Kymlicka's own claims, support intervention in nature.

Chapter 7 addresses the tricky issue of *priority*, exploring three separate sets of arguments. First, animals could be *excluded* from distributive principles, or the importance of animals' interests within distributive principles could be *deflated*. Second, intervention in nature could involve the loss of some of the best things in life. (This is a perfectionist challenge.) Third, intervention in nature could detract from assisting domesticated animals.

Chapter 8 turns to tractability, arguing that, in principle, we do have the ability to reduce wild animal suffering. The chapter is relatively short, primarily, I suspect, because Faria does not want to get too far into questions about which particular interventions we could or should champion. A conclusion follows.

This is an excellent book. Faria shows that if we are committed to reducing animal suffering, we should be serious about intervening in nature. This is a conclusion that should worry any utilitarian who is not already committed to intervention. (And not just utilitarians.) Of course, being serious about intervening in nature does not commit us to any particular interventions in practice.

Above, I identified a few places where I think readers could diverge from Faria to resist her conclusions. And I would like to finish by presenting a view that, I think, approximates my own (see my *Just Fodder: The Ethics of Feeding Animals*, 2022). Whether I am best categorized as a conservative advocate or a sympathetic critic of interventionism I leave the reader to decide; I suspect it depends where one is standing. But I accept that for Faria (and, indeed, many readers of this journal), my position will be unattractively non-consequentialist.

I am ultimately not sure whether we have *prima facie* duties to reduce ‘distant’ wild animals’ suffering – I am, as indicated, sympathetic to the relational critiques of intervention that Faria challenges. But if we do have these duties, I suspect that these are not duties of justice. (I note, incidentally, that Faria’s goal is explicitly ‘not to make a political case for helping wild animals’ [p. 165]. She stays firmly in the realm of moral philosophy.)

Further, these hypothetical duties frequently will not be as strong as *other* positive duties (sometimes of justice, sometimes not) that we have towards ‘close’ animals (including, but not limited to, humans and domesticated animals) – that is, animals with whom we are in morally salient relationships.

This position has at least three important consequences.

1. *Prima facie* moral duties to wild animals cannot, normally, outweigh the duties of justice that we have towards wild animals. Put simply, we cannot violate rights in order to discharge ‘merely’ moral obligations – or, to be glib, we cannot shoot the lion to save the gazelle. (This is not a ‘perversity’ worry; this is a ‘jeopardy’ worry, but one different from those Faria addresses, and one that applies only to some possible interventions.)
2. The fact that these are not duties of justice means that reducing wild animal suffering is not the business of the state, even if it is the business of the state to respect and protect wild animals’ rights, and thus prevent rights-violating (even if suffering-reducing) interventions. (This is a worry about the attribution of duties, something Faria does not explore at length.)
3. We have at least some (justice-based or otherwise) reasons to prioritize reducing the suffering of some non-wild animals (including humans) as individuals and collectives. (This is a ‘priority’ worry.)

But my concerns are far from an out-and-out rejection of helping wild animals. If Faria (or another interventionist) could identify achievable and (crucially) rights-respecting interventions that reduced wild animal suffering, an advocate of the kind of relational approach to which I am sympathetic may well have reason to cheer for them.

At the same time, though, the relationist would perhaps not have as much reason to cheer for these interventions as she would have to cheer for policies or practices that could reduce the suffering and rights violations faced by animals kept for meat, milk, or eggs. And that is so even if there is more suffering in the forest than on the farm.