



Wild Animals and Duties of Assistance

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Abstract

Is there a moral requirement to assist wild animals suffering due to natural causes? According to the *laissez-faire intuition*, although we may have *special* duties to assist wild animals, there are no *general* requirements to care for them. If this view is right, then our positive duties toward wild animals can be only special, grounded in special circumstances. In this article I present the *contribution argument* which employs the thought that the receipt of benefits from wild animals is one such kind of special circumstance. If this argument is correct, then the circle of moral agents required to assist some wild animals is significantly widened.

Keywords Animal ethics · Wild animal suffering · Duties of assistance · Laissez-faire intuition · Special positive duties · Benefit-sharing

Introduction

Many wild animals suffer due to various natural causes: disasters, starvation, disease, just to name a few (Animal Ethics, 2016; Horta, 2010; Ng, 1995). On the assumption that sentient wild animals are morally considerable,¹ are we required to assist them in their struggle to live lives free from suffering? Some have argued that we are morally required to aid suffering wild animals, provided that we could do so without excessive cost to ourselves (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; McMahan, 2015; Nussbaum, 2006). Drawing on Peter Singer's (1972) famous argument for the

¹ In this article I assume that *sentience* is a necessary and sufficient condition for moral considerability. I opt for the *sentience* view because only sentient beings are capable of having positive and negative experiences; only such beings can feel whatever happens to them and this, intuitively speaking, seems to be essential for being morally considerable. On this view, then, all sentient wild animals are morally considerable. But which animals exactly are sentient? There is a scientific consensus that at least all vertebrate animals are sentient (Proctor, 2012). Although there is some evidence suggesting that some invertebrates such as insects and crustaceans are sentient, the question nevertheless remains controversial (Smith, 1991). Given this, the article will concern only vertebrate wild animals.

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obligation to assist distant strangers, these authors urge to extend the application of this argument to wild animals and contend that if we are required to assist needy humans, so are we required to assist suffering wild animals. Others, unconvinced by Singer's argument, or skeptical of its application to wild animals, have claimed otherwise. They adopted the so-called "hands-off" approach to wild animal suffering and argued that unless we are responsible for their suffering, it is better to leave wild animals alone (Francione, 2000; Gruen, 2011; Pluhar, 1995; Regan, 1983). Their views are now collectively called the *laissez-faire intuition* (LFI), according to which although we may have *special* duties to assist wild animals, there are no *general* requirements to care for them (Palmer, 2010, 2013). On this view, for the duties of assistance to be created toward wild animals, some special relations or circumstances must be present. Thus, the LFI endorses the account of positive duties, according to which the requirements to assist others are created only on the basis of special circumstances.

In this article I do not wish to challenge the LFI; instead, I will assume that it is a correct view. If the LFI is right, then the only kind of positive duties we can have toward wild animals are special duties, grounded in special circumstances. One such circumstance that is generally thought to create positive duties toward wild animals is the infliction of unjustified harms on these animals. In cases like this, often called *reparation cases*, it is argued, justice requires that we assist wild animals who have been harmed by our actions (Palmer, 2010, p. 99). In this article I argue that, in addition to that, there is another, largely neglected circumstance that grounds special duties of assistance toward some wild animals. This circumstance is a receipt of benefits from these animals. In what follows I develop an argument, called the *contribution argument*, that demonstrates how beneficiaries can be required to assist wild animals from whom they benefit. If this argument is successful, then the circle of moral agents who are required to assist some wild animals is significantly expanded.

The Contribution Argument

Before presenting the contribution argument, it will be helpful to consider some real-life situations to which this argument is intended to apply. Consider, for example, the following scenarios:

Majestic Elephants: Suppose you are a freelance wildlife photographer—you take photos of wild animals, edit these photos and sell them. For the last few weeks, you have been regularly following a herd of elephants and photographing it. Because you are a skillful photographer and the elephants you picture are majestic, the photos turn out to be selling well and you are making a good profit. One day, as you approach the herd of elephants, you notice that one of the elephants has an infected wound that causes a significant amount of pain and if not treated an infection will spread and kill the elephant. You are deliberating whether you are required to assist the elephant.

Twittering Birds: Suppose that stress and anxiety are constituent parts of your life. To lighten the burdens of your life, you regularly seek a calming and quiet environment. In that respect, a small garden next to your house is just the right place for you. A relaxing atmosphere in this garden is significantly enhanced by the twittering birds. Every time you visit the garden, their cheerful twittering fills your mind with positive energy. As approaching winter is going to be unusually cold and hard, you realize that these birds will have a hard time feeding themselves and surviving on their own. You are deliberating whether you are required to provide care for these birds.

In these scenarios, can the fact that you benefited from these animals generate your duty to assist them? In the remainder of this article I argue that it can. But before I do so, let us first define and clarify the key terms that form part of the contribution argument.

We can start with the term “wild animal”. By this term I mean an animal who is undomesticated (i.e., has not been bred by humans) and lives independently in a natural environment that is generally undisturbed and unaffected by human actions (i.e., wilderness). By contrast, a domesticated animal is an animal who has been selectively bred by humans (Palmer, 2010, p. 66).

Now few words about the term “benefit”. I will take this term to mean intrinsic and instrumental goods possession of which makes beneficiaries better off. A benefit can be material (e.g., money) or immaterial (e.g., pleasure). Next, the argument concerns a benefit that is produced with the contribution of wild animals. For example, in *Majestic Elephants*, you received a material benefit that is produced with the contribution of a herd of elephants. In *Twittering Birds*, you received an immaterial benefit that is partly produced by the twittering birds. Moreover, benefiting from wild animals may or may not involve harming these animals. That benefiting by harming animals creates the duties of assistance toward the victims is uncontroversial. What is unclear, however, is whether benefiting from animals without harming them creates beneficiaries’ duties to assist these animals. Given this, the argument will concern only a benefit that is produced without harming wild animals.

Finally, the central claim of this article that we are required to assist wild animals from *whom* we benefit suggests that we know the identity of these animals. However, in many cases it will be difficult, if not impossible, to identify the exact animals who contributed to the production of the benefits we received. Let us call these animals the *unidentified contributors*. In the case of unidentified contributors, it is not entirely clear what the contribution argument requires us to do. I will address this issue later.

After clarifying some conceptual issues concerning the contribution argument, we can now turn to the argument itself. The contribution argument employs the thought that the mere receipt of benefits from wild animals is morally significant and is sufficient to ground the beneficiaries’ duty to assist these animals. Briefly, the argument goes as follows: Throughout our lives we receive various benefits, some of which are produced with the contribution of other individuals. A paradigmatic example would be the benefits produced with the help of our family members, friends, teachers and even strangers through their material and moral support,

meaningful relationships, valuable advice, inspiration, and so on. Because these individuals contributed to the production of the benefits we receive, the contributors acquire their fair share of these benefits. For that reason, such benefits ought to be shared with the contributors in proportion to their contributory role in producing these benefits.² Thus, keeping such benefits all for ourselves would be unfair. Among individuals that may contribute to the production of the benefits we receive are wild animals. For example, we derive great pleasure from observing and interacting with them; photographing these animals and/or documenting their lives are also common ways of making a profit. So, these are some of the ways in which some wild animals contribute to the production of the benefits we receive and thus acquire their share in these benefits. Therefore, these animals ought to be granted their fair share of these benefits. But how are we to share the benefits with animals? One obvious requirement in that respect is that the benefits ought to be shared with animals in such a way that these animals are actually benefited. The most reasonable way to benefit animals, I suggest, is to provide care for them. Therefore, we ought to care for the animals who contribute to the production of the benefits we receive. More formally this argument can be stated as follows:

P1: We ought to share the benefits we receive with whoever contributed to their production;

P2: Some wild animals contribute to the production of some benefits we receive;

C1: We ought to share the benefits we receive with wild animals who contributed to the production of these benefits;

P3: The best way to share the benefits with wild animals is to provide care for them;

C2: We ought to provide care for wild animals who contributed to the production of the benefits we receive.

In the remainder of this article I will elaborate on each premise and defend them against some possible objections.

Contribution and Benefit-Sharing

The first premise—a substantive moral principle—is a fundamental premise on which the whole argument rests. The basic idea of this premise is that the benefit that is produced with a contribution of an entity (or entities) other than the beneficiary is a joint, common or collective benefit and belongs to the contributing individuals in proportion to their contribution (even if it happens that, sometimes, the nature of this benefit is such that it can be received only by the beneficiary [e.g., the

² Perhaps it is worth mentioning here that the idea that receiving benefits from others (humans) generates the beneficiaries' obligation to make a reciprocal, beneficent response toward their benefactors is central to the discussions concerning the duty of reciprocity (Becker, 1998; Mackenzie, 2013). The defenses of the duty of reciprocity vary, however, it is, I think, the argument I am developing here that best explains the requirement for a reciprocal response (see section "[Contribution and Benefit-Sharing](#)"). But, since the duty of reciprocity is not relevant to my argument, I will not discuss it any further.

experience of pleasure]). Such a benefit, I suggest, should be viewed as some kind of shared property in which every contributor's role and thus share is adequately acknowledged. The justification for the requirement to share that benefit comes from the fact that the contributors, through their contribution to the production of this benefit, acquire their fair share of this benefit and in that sense, some part of this benefit constitutes their property. For that reason, the beneficiary owes the contributors their fair share of this benefit.

The idea that producing the benefit with the contribution of others requires that this benefit be shared with the contributors can be better illustrated by drawing on the phenomenon known as *biopiracy*.³ Biopiracy is a practice of (unauthorized) profiting from natural resources and/or traditional knowledge that had been discovered and preserved by others (e.g., indigenous people, local communities, etc.), without acknowledging and compensating other's contribution that made profiting possible (Robinson, 2010; Satheshkumar & Narayanan, 2017). One of the main charges often made against biopiracy is that it is an unfair practice as it takes advantage of others' contribution, namely that it deliberately fails to ensure that the produced benefit is (adequately) shared with the contributors. The basic idea behind this criticism is that the contribution that the individuals make to the production of the benefit entitles them to a fair share of the produced benefit and biopiracy fails to compensate their share (Magnus & Allyse, 2013).

My defense of the first premise draws on the idea of the property rights⁴ of individuals. Since the contribution argument concerns (wild) animals, its success, then, turns on the question of whether animals can be the subjects of property rights—that is, whether certain things can belong to or be the property of animals. The denial of the property rights of animals, for one reason or another, can turn into a valid objection to this argument. However, apart from the shamefully inadequate and notoriously speciesist existing legal system that is employed throughout the world, I cannot think of any context in which the idea of property rights of animals would seem inconceivable. In fact, there have been some respectable views put forward arguing that animals do indeed have property rights. For example, one view employs the *interest-based* account of property rights and maintains that some wild animals have sufficiently strong interests that warrant these animals property rights to their natural habitat. The argumentation is as follows: Some wild animals have sufficiently strong interests in remaining alive and having well-being that should be protected from human violations. Since allowing these animals to access and use their natural habitat is essential to the satisfaction of their vital interests, it should be ensured that wild animal habitat is not destroyed or animals are not prevented from using it by humans. Granting animals property rights to their habitat best ensures this. Then it follows that some wild animals should be granted property rights to their natural habitat (Cooke, 2017; Hadley, 2015). Another view employs the Lockean *labor-mixing* account of property rights and states that some animals come to the possession of unowned objects by mixing their labor with those objects. The argument may run

³ I thank Clare Palmer for drawing my attention to the biopiracy phenomenon.

⁴ In this article I will understand “property right” as a right to the exclusive use of a given object or a resource.

as follows: Some animals engage in activities in which they mix their labor with previously unowned objects. Because the objects used in this process have no owner and these animals add their labor to it, the resulting object or creation becomes their property. For example, many wild animals use unowned natural resources to build their dens or shelters, gather food from unowned sources and store them for later. On this account, then, these animals acquire property rights to whatever they create through their labor (Milburn, 2017).

This discussion should not be taken to suggest that I endorse any of the above-mentioned accounts of property acquisition. This is merely to demonstrate that there is nothing inherently absurd or inconceivable about the property rights of animals. As noted earlier, as far as a joint, shared property is concerned, it is the contribution to the production or creation of that property – in this case the benefits we receive – that grants property rights to contributors. Whether wild animals contribute to the production of the benefits we receive and whether it is a kind of contribution that grounds their property rights to the benefit thus produced will be discussed next.

Wild Animal Contribution

The second premise concerns two important claims: an *empirical* claim that some wild animals do indeed contribute to the production of some benefits we receive and a *moral* claim that their contribution is a type of contribution that ought to be compensated. I will address these claims in turn.

An empirical claim that some wild animals contribute to the production of some benefits we receive can hardly be disputed. A paradigmatic example of a practice in which some of us benefit from wild animals is wildlife tourism. Many people are eager to travel to exotic places to see some species of wild animals in their natural habitat. Observing wild animals in person gives the visitors a great excitement and unique experience. However, being unable to travel to exotic places need not prevent one from enjoying wild animals. Viewing photographs and documentary films depicting the lives of wild animals is another source of excitement and satisfaction of our curiosity. Moreover, for many people documenting the lives of wild animals is an effective means to gaining some material benefits—commercial wildlife photography and filmmaking are often considered as one of the fairly profitable businesses. For example, subscription television channels such as National Geographic Wild, Animal Planet and BBC Earth are some of the most successful TV channels whose content is dominated by or entirely devoted to the programs about wildlife. The receipt of the benefits that are produced with the contribution of some wild animals need not be limited to private individuals and corporations. In some countries the beneficiaries can be the whole population too. For instance, wildlife tourism, as one of the forms of tourism, is a major driver of economic growth in certain countries and in that sense can positively affect the well-being of local people. From this discussion, I believe, it is more than clear that wild animals play a crucial role in the production of some benefits we receive and with that the second premise is partly defended.

A moral claim that wild animal contribution is a type of contribution that ought to be compensated by beneficiaries is more controversial. While it is undeniable that some wild animals contribute to the production of some benefits we receive, it is nevertheless debatable whether such contribution counts as morally relevant—that is, whether their contribution ought to be or deserves to be compensated or rewarded. It could be argued that in order for a contribution to count as morally relevant, and thus be worthy of being rewarded or compensated, it should meet certain requirements. The requirements that determine what beneficiaries owe to their benefactors (or contributors) are often found in the discussions concerning the duty of gratitude (Manela, 2019; McConnell, 2013) and reciprocity (Becker, 1980, 1998; Mackenzie, 2013). In these discussions it is widely agreed that a recipient of gratitude or reciprocal response must *act* and that this action must be *intentional*. Similarly, then, if we are to require beneficiaries to share their benefits with wild animals, the wild animal contribution must be an intentional action. Unless wild animals intentionally contribute to the production of some benefits we receive, beneficiaries are not required to share their benefits with wild animals.

While I agree that gratitude and reciprocal response need to be deserved, I disagree that the compensation of one's contribution needs to be similarly deserved. The nature of gratitude and reciprocal response is such that it presupposes an intentional action on a recipient's part. This is because without a recipient's intentional action gratitude and reciprocity would be inexplicable—that is, it would be difficult to see for what we are expressing our praise, gratitude or perform a reciprocal action if a recipient did not act or acted but did not intend what he did. However, the compensation of one's contribution works differently. A contributor need not *deserve* the compensation of his contribution because the requirement that beneficiaries share their benefit with the contributors hinges on the fact that the contributors have their fair share of the benefit and they are entitled to it as their property. It is important to note that the contributors acquire their fair share of the produced benefit with their causal involvement, whether intentional or not, in the production of this benefit and for that reason the requirement of a desert in relation to the contributors is misplaced. On this view, then, as long as we can identify one's contribution in the production of a particular benefit, this would be sufficient for the claim that one has one's fair share of this benefit. Because one's fair share of the benefit is one's property, it ought to be compensated.⁵ This reasoning can be further substantiated by considering the following scenario:

Rock Star: Suppose that a paparazzi takes a covert photo of a popular rock star casually standing on the street. The paparazzi then turns this photo into thousands of posters and puts them on sale. Due to the huge fanbase of the famous

⁵ This view can be challenged as follows: If one's contribution to the production of a particular benefit need not be an intentional action, then some inanimate entities, or even animate but non-sentient entities, could be said to be the contributors to some benefit as long as they are causally involved in its production and we may be required to share the benefits with such entities, which seems absurd. I think this objection can be easily dismissed. In the beginning of this article I have assumed that sentience is a necessary and sufficient condition for moral considerability, meaning that all and only sentient beings are morally considerable. On this view, then, non-sentient beings are excluded from moral domain and thus it can simply be noted that we cannot owe anything to the entities that are not morally considerable. Therefore, we are not required to share the benefits with them.

rock star, the poster sells well and the paparazzi gains a considerable amount of profit. He decides not to share it with the rock star.

In this scenario, it seems very plausible to say that the paparazzi acts wrongly by refusing to share the benefits with the rock star. This is because it is the rock star's much-admired persona and popularity that largely determined the success of the selling from which the photographer benefited, and this contribution seems to entitle the rock star to his fair share of the produced benefit, even if his contribution was not an intentional action.

A critic may concede that, in the scenario above, the photographer should share his benefits with the rock star. This is because, a critic may argue, the rock star put *indirect* efforts into his contribution to the production of the benefits the photographer received, by putting great efforts into gaining much admiration and popularity that made the production of these benefits possible. And it is these indirect efforts that best explains why his contribution should be compensated.⁶

By the same reasoning, then, a critic may continue, in order for there to be a requirement to compensate wild animal contribution, these animals should put at least indirect efforts into their contribution to the production of the benefits we receive. That wild animals do not normally put *direct* efforts into their contribution is apparent. For example, in Majestic Elephants and Twittering Birds, the animals seem to be simply minding their own business—elephants naturally roaming around and birds just twittering—and although they causally contribute to the production of the benefits you receive, they seem to be putting no efforts at all into this contribution. But do wild animals put *indirect* efforts into their contribution? They certainly do, and here is how: In order for us to benefit from wild animals, these animals should exist in the first place—that is, they should remain alive and be around. And it is fair to say that every wild animal makes painstaking efforts to maintain themselves: they search for food, survive harsh weather conditions, escape predators, and so on. So, behind every wild animal there are great efforts put into staying alive, making it possible for us to benefit from them. Given this, the wild animal contribution is not really an effortless contribution after all.

The very same reasoning is behind the biopiracy phenomenon that I drew on earlier. In biopiracy, although indigenous or local people do not *intentionally* contribute to the production of the benefits that beneficiaries receive, they are still entitled to the compensation because they put *indirect* efforts into their contribution by, for example, discovering and preserving the traditional knowledge or natural resources that make profiting possible (Magnus & Allyse, 2013). Similarly, then, wild animals

⁶ One reviewer objected that even if people agree that the rock star should receive compensation in this case, it is not clear what they may have in mind: the compensation for his contribution to the production of the benefits the paparazzi received or the compensation for any distress the paparazzi may have caused him by producing and selling posters without his prior consent. It appears, then, that there are two issues here: (1) compensation for *contribution* and (2) compensation for *moral damages*. (1) and (2) are not mutually exclusive. It can be that the rock star should receive both kinds of compensation. The reviewer's point here is that it is *unclear* whether people agree to (1) or (2), or to both. To resolve this uncertainty, we can modify the scenario by supposing that the rock star never becomes aware of what paparazzi did and thus never suffers distress. In this modified scenario, I believe people's intuitive reaction would still be that the rock star should receive compensation. This time it would be certain that what they have in mind is (1).

are entitled to the compensation because they put indirect efforts into contributing to the production of the benefits we receive, by making great efforts to remain alive and in good condition, which makes benefiting from these animals possible.

Above I have argued that because wild animals make great efforts to remain alive, which eventually makes benefiting from these animals possible, they are entitled to the compensation for their contribution to the benefits thus produced. Let us call these animals the *primary contributors*. But in trying to remain alive, these primary contributor animals themselves are not the only ones who make great efforts. Other animals such as the family and group members often make great efforts to provide care and protection for the primary contributor animals. This way, these other animals indirectly contribute to the production of the benefits we receive from the primary contributor animals. Let us call these animals the *secondary contributors*. Does my argumentation, then, imply that the secondary contributor animals too are entitled to the compensation because, after all, they too are the contributors? Yes, it does. Suppose that you benefited from a particular single elephant. It is very plausible to think that some members of his family and herd made great efforts to provide care and protection for him, ensuring his survival. And it seems that it would be unfair to deny these elephants compensation for their contribution. Thus, the contribution argument would require us that we acknowledge the secondary contributors and their role in the production of the benefits we receive.

Assisting Wild Animals

The third premise provides a transition from the requirement to share the benefits with wild animals to the requirement to provide care for them. It does so by suggesting that the purpose of the requirement to share the benefits with animals is best served by requiring beneficiaries to provide care for these animals. This suggestion can be defended as follows: It is rational and commonsensical to claim that if we are to share the benefits with animals, this should be done in such a way that these animals are actually benefited. Animals are benefited when their well-being is increased or they are prevented from having their well-being decreased. The animals' well-being is best increased or prevented from being decreased when these animals are properly cared for—that is, it is ensured that their basic needs are satisfied and safe living environment provided.⁷ If providing care for animals is the best way to benefit them, then the third premise can be said to achieve its goal: to convert the obligation to share the benefits with animals into the obligation to care for them.

It is possible to accept that we have an obligation to share the benefits with wild animals but to deny that we have an obligation to care for them because most of us, it could be claimed, fulfill our obligations through the payments for the benefits we receive to which some animals contributed. For example, whether we observe wild animals in their natural habitat in person or view photographs and documentary

⁷ I use “proper care” as an umbrella term comprising all the essential aspects of species-specific care necessary for an animal to have a well-being or to flourish. Of course, in determining the essential aspects of species-specific care, competent professionals should be consulted.

films depicting their lives on TV or computer, we often pay the fees for that and, one could claim, this should count as sharing the benefits with these animals.

This objection does not hold. First, although big beneficiary corporations such as National Geographic Society and BBC actively direct their funds toward wildlife causes, their primary goal is species preservation and not the well-being of individual animals.⁸ Since species as a whole can be preserved without necessarily ensuring the flourishing of all its individual members, it does not follow that these corporations assist individual animals. Also, many wild animals from whom these corporations often benefit are not the members of the endangered species requiring preservation and thus are not the recipients of these funds. Moreover, among wildlife photographers and filmmakers there is a widespread dogma stating that we should not intervene in natural processes and always let the nature take its course. This non-interventionist dogma is so widely accepted that when a BBC wildlife film crew decided to rescue a group of penguins trapped in a gully, it was seen as an “unprecedented move” (Zhang, 2018). Given this, it seems unlikely that suffering animals receive any help from these beneficiaries.⁹ Second, even if some companies or agencies do care for the animals, they do so only to maintain the profitability of animals, and since this can be achieved without adequate care, animals are almost never properly cared for and their contribution cannot be said to be proportionally compensated.¹⁰

If we are required to provide care for wild animals from whom we benefit, how much care and for how long should we provide for these animals? The answer to this question very much depends on the amount of the contribution of these animals—that is, the extent and duration of the provided care should be proportional to their contribution to the production of the benefits we receive. For example, you may benefit from wild animals only occasionally. In this case, the provided care will be occasional. Alternatively, if you benefit from wild animals on a regular basis, then the assistance too should be provided on a regular basis.

A follow-up question would concern the animals we are supposed to care for. In some cases, such animals will be identifiable—that is, we will know which animal exactly we are required to provide care for. In other cases, it will be practically impossible to identify or later recognize such animals. In cases of uncertainty concerning the identity of the animals we are required to care for, our best bet would be

⁸ For example, BBC and National Geographic Society state wildlife conservation as one of their missions. They say nothing about helping suffering wild animals not belonging to the endangered species (BBC, 2014; National Geographic Society, 2020).

⁹ The examples of wildlife photographers and filmmakers refraining from aiding wild animals and letting them suffer or die are many. One of the recent ones is the case of walrus falling off the cliff to their death. The filming crew made no attempts to intervene and rescue them (West, 2019).

¹⁰ A paradigmatic example is wildlife tourism. Many tourists travel long distances to see exotic animals in person and capture the encounter. To ensure that tourists have a close interaction with these animals, facility managers keep the animals in captivity, often, in poor and inadequate living conditions since doing so leads to more profit (Moorhouse et al., 2015). Of course, this practice involves, mostly, captive wild animals, not free-living ones, but if facility managers are so unconcerned about the well-being of captive animals, it would be naïve to suppose that they would be any more concerned about the well-being of free-living ones.

to provide care for the animals that belong to the species whose members contributed to the production of the benefit we received and reside in the same territory, with the hope that among these animals will be the ones to whom providing care is owed. Moreover, in many places there are various specialized state or private organizations and agencies that are established for the purpose of monitoring wild animal populations and caring for them. In cases of unidentifiable contributor animals, then, it would be best to share the benefits with such organizations (e.g., by donating money to them) that operate in a respective location.

Discussions concerning wild animal assistance should not overlook the worries often associated with intervention in nature. This is because wild animals are a part of a complex ecosystem in which the lives of many different animal species are intertwined with each other, and assisting some of them may imply, to some extent, interfering with the lives of others. Such interferences, if not done with caution, may bring unpredictable consequences, negatively affecting the lives of other animals. Thus, if we are to take the contribution argument seriously, such worries need to be addressed.

One immediate worry is that providing assistance to one animal may harm another, and it is necessary to know beforehand what we ought to do in such a case. Generally speaking, there is a very strong presumption against harming morally considerable beings without a justifying reason. And it is doubtful that one animal's need for assistance may justify harming another, other things being equal. So, it seems that we are not permitted to assist an animal in a way that harms another.¹¹ Of course, when other things are not equal, then assisting animals in a way that harms others could be justified. For example, if assistance prevents grave harm (e.g., death or prolonged suffering) to one animal, while inflicts insignificant harm (e.g., temporary stress) to another, then such assistance may well be morally permissible.

Another worry concerns the suggestion I have made earlier. I noted that in case there are unidentified contributor animals, we should provide assistance to the members of the species to which the unidentified animal belongs (assuming that we know the species of this animal), hoping that among the assisted ones will be the animal to whom the assistance is owed. This suggestion could be seen as forcing assistance on the animals who may not really need any at that moment. Of course, this is not how my suggestion should be understood. This suggestion implies a situation in which animals we intend to assist really need such assistance. Otherwise, our efforts would be at best futile and at worst counterproductive. But what happens, then, if animals we are required to assist do not need assistance at a given moment? The simple answer I can give here is that we just postpone the assistance and provide one when animals really need it. I will give a more elaborate response to this question later.

Assisting wild animals, although beneficial in the short run, may turn out problematic in the long run. This may happen if the animals we assist become too

¹¹ In the relevant discussions it is often considered morally impermissible to benefit one in a way that harms another, other things being equal. This view is often defended by appealing to the morally relevant difference between *doing* and *allowing* harm. It is argued that doing harm is worse than allowing harm to occur, other things being equal. This very claim underlies the view that *negative* duties are stronger than *positive* duties (Woollard & Howard-Snyder, 2016). Detailed defense of this view lies outside the scope of this article.

dependent on our assistance, becoming unable to survive on their own. The possibility that assisted animals may become too dependent on us hardly means that we should refrain from providing assistance to them. Instead, this suggests that we should proceed with great care when working out the ways of assisting these animals. More specifically, wild animals should be assisted in such a way as to provide them with a necessary aid while, at the same time, enabling them to live good lives on their own. Generally speaking, animals become dependent when they are provided with care on a regular basis. So, this may suggest that we refrain from assisting them regularly. But, sometimes, assisting wild animals regularly is necessary for their well-being, as many of them cannot cope with the hardships of nature and, as a result, suffer systematically. In such cases, if refraining from providing regular care means letting these animals suffer greatly and/or die, then providing regular care and thus allowing these animals to become dependent seems a better option for them.

Final Remarks

The contribution argument, if convincing, can be seen as laying the foundation for a mutually beneficial relation between humans and wild animals, where both sides act as beneficiaries. So far, this relation has been one-sided—humans benefiting from wild animals without acknowledging and compensating the contribution of the latter. This argument would command that the produced benefits be shared between humans and wild animals in proportion to their contribution to the production of the benefits thus produced. More specifically, it would require beneficiaries that they provide care for wild animals from whom they benefit.

Since the contribution argument concerns only those wild animals from whom we benefit, there might be a worry that certain animals, for one reason or another, may characteristically fail to be beneficial to us and thus may never fall within the scope of this argument. The worry is whether this would be unfair.

The reasons for the failure of certain wild animals to be beneficial to us can be various: some animals, individually or as a species, may be aesthetically unappealing or even repulsive; some may never catch our attention due to a taxonomic bias; some may even never be observed. In such cases, since no benefiting relations are established between us and these animals, the contribution argument would not apply to them. To see whether these cases reflect any injustice or unfairness, we need to turn to the LFI. According to the LFI, justice is concerned exclusively with negative duties (Palmer, 2010, p. 88). So, on this view, when there is no violation of negative duties, the questions of justice or fairness do not arise. Accordingly, the LFI would maintain that since in exercising our subjective (aesthetic) preferences we do not violate our negative duties toward these animals, the resulting situation cannot be unfair. Thus, from the perspective of the LFI, if there is no benefiting relation between some of us and certain animal species because, say, we do not find them aesthetically pleasing, this fact can be unfortunate for these animals as we will not be required to assist them, but by no means unfair.

There is one more question concerning wild animal assistance that merits closer scrutiny. As noted earlier, there will be cases in which the animals we are required to assist will be unidentifiable (i.e., unidentified contributor animals). In some cases, it will be physically impossible for us to provide assistance to the animals (e.g., due to a distance). In other cases, the animals in question may not need assistance at a given moment. In such cases, it is preferable, I suggest, to share the benefits we received from wild animals with specialized state or private wildlife organizations that generally monitor and provide care for wild animal populations and operate in a respective location. The benefits can be shared with such organizations by donating to their funds, in which case, the amount of donation should be made in proportion to the contribution of the animals. This way we can hope (or perhaps ensure to some extent) that the assistance will be provided to the animals to whom it is owed and when they need it most. This suggestion implies that for the contribution argument it is not essential that the assistance be provided by the beneficiaries personally. Depending on the circumstances, it may be even better for the animals if the beneficiaries arrange providing assistance via third parties (e.g., specialists). Finally, in case there are no specialized wildlife agencies in certain locations, the contribution argument would urge establishing such agencies.

I would like to end this article by recalling the scenarios considered in the beginning. In *Majestic Elephants and Twittering Birds*, what would the contribution argument require you to do? On the contribution argument, you are certainly required to provide care for the needy animals in both scenarios. These animals have been contributing to the production of the benefit you have been receiving so far. Without their contribution, the particular benefit you received would not be produced. Because of their contribution to the production of the benefit you received, these animals acquire their fair share of this benefit, which you ought to compensate in one way or another. Providing care for these animals seems to be the best way to compensate the benefits you owe to these animals, and the situation they are in seems a perfect chance for you to fulfill your obligations. Certainly, assisting these animals would not be an easy task for you, but suppose that at a reasonable cost to yourself these animals could be well taken care of. For example, let us assume that at a cost that does not exceed the value of the contribution of these animals, you could have an injured elephant treated by the specialists and you could buy food and build a small house for the birds. In both scenarios, walking away from the situation would mean refusing to share with these animals the benefits you received and since their fair share of these benefits is their property, doing so would be unfair.

Conclusion

According to the LFI, we have no general duties to assist wild animals. The implication of the LFI is that we are not *normally* required to assist wild animals suffering due to *natural* causes. But the LFI is compatible with the claim that we may have special duties to assist wild animals insofar as there are some special circumstances or relations that ground such duties. In this article I argued that one such special

circumstance that has been largely ignored in the relevant literature is the receipt of benefits from wild animals. By presenting the contribution argument I attempted to demonstrate how some of us who benefit from wild animals can be required to assist these animals when they are in need.

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Declarations

Conflicts of interest The author declare that they have no competing interests.

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