

When Preservationism Doesn't Preserve*

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Preservation and Conservation

Is it okay to shoot an elephant so that you can carve the tusks into fancy ivory chess pieces? Is it okay to chop down a Redwood so that you can take a picture of people dancing on the stump? Probably not. What exactly is wrong with such things, though? That is a tougher question, and there is a controversy in environmental ethics over how to answer it.

One approach is what we call conservationism. The idea is that elephants and Redwoods are a precious resource, too precious to waste on trifles. Scarce and precious resources should be conserved. They should be used wisely, taking into account costs and benefits for future generations as well as our own. Chopping down a Redwood so you can take pictures of people dancing on the stump is a waste: a waste of lumber or of a tourist attraction.

What if it is not a waste, though? What if the lumber is used efficiently and the tree stump dance floor itself becomes a major tourist attraction—a source of human happiness for generations to come? Wouldn't it still be wrong? Don't Redwoods somehow deserve more *respect* than that? Among people who do environmental ethics, conservationism has to some degree been supplanted by a second approach, which we call preservationism. Although we

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cannot avoid exploiting the natural world to some extent, preservationism's core idea is that nature has a moral status independent of its utility for humankind. There are some ecosystems that should simply be left alone to evolve according to their own lights, free of human use and human interference. The conservationist slogan is "wise use." The preservationist slogan is "let it be." According to preservation ethics, we should not think of wilderness as a mere resource. Wilderness commands reverence in a way mere resources do not.

One concern a preservationist might have about conservation ethics, then, is that it fails to make room for reverence. There are other, more contingent concerns as well. First, we ought to be skeptical about wise use policies regarding resources whose range of potential uses is largely unknown. "Wise use" of rain forests, for example, might not be very wise in the long term because there might be goods we do not know about yet that we unwittingly are squandering. Second, there might be other goods, like atmospheric oxygen, that rain forests would go on producing for us if we just left them alone. In that case, *using* a resource interferes with *benefiting* from it. Third, "wise use" of rain forests might be exposing us to diseases that otherwise would have stayed in the rain forests. There are species of mosquitoes that live only in the rain forest canopy. They feed only on monkeys that live in the canopy and they transmit diseases only to those monkeys. When you chop down the trees, though, those mosquitoes are suddenly on the forest floor where they have never been before. They and the organisms they carry suddenly are exposed to a population of six billion human beings. It would not be like them to let that much food go to waste.

So, there are reasons why people plausibly could say the wisest use of rain forests is virtually no use at all, at least for now. And when wise use is tantamount to no use at all, we have a situation where preservationism has won out on conservationism's own grounds. It is no surprise, then, that many (perhaps most) environmental ethicists today see conservationism as an ethic whose time has passed. My sympathies, too, lie mainly (although not exclusively) with preservationism.

However, after reading Raymond Bonner's book on wildlife conservation in Africa, and after travelling to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Zambia to see as much as I could for myself, I have had to rethink the wisdom of preservationism, at least in the African context.¹ Bonner was in Africa on other business when he stumbled into an ugly debate over the legitimacy of the ivory trade. Was it a good idea to ban international trade in ivory products? I do not know. This paper's purpose is not to take sides in that debate but rather to do something more philosophical: to reflect on what Bonner's experience, and mine, reveals about the practical limitations of preservationist philosophy.

If you were writing a Hollywood movie script, you would have the bad guys being in favor of shooting elephants for ivory (at "sustainable levels" of course). The good guys would say elephants are a sacred world heritage and that it is a moral crime to be hacking their faces off and turning their tusks into trinkets. That is how you would be expected to write the script and that is just what Bonner expected to find. What he actually found was quite different.

Vigilante Preservationism

Guy Grant bought his ranch in Kenya in 1963. He had twenty-five zebra at the time. Today he has over a thousand. He once sold hunting rights to zebra, elephant, buffalo, and warthogs, which provided a third of his income. In any case, he needs to keep the zebra population down to have room to graze cattle. Sport hunting, however, was banned in 1977. He could not sell hunting licenses anymore, so he had to hunt zebra himself. He still made money selling meat and hides, but trade in wildlife products was banned in 1978, so he lost that income too. Now, because of the ban, he has to graze more cattle to make ends meet. And he still has to keep the zebra population down. Otherwise it will bankrupt him. The only change is that he cannot make money from the zebra. Think about what that means. Without income from zebra, Grant has to graze more cattle to make the same money, which means he has less room for zebra, which means he has to shoot more zebra than otherwise would be necessary. *More zebra get shot* because of the ban on hunting them for sport.

The situation on Guy Grant's ranch is far from unique. For better or worse, Kenya had become one of Africa's most enlightened countries, at least in terms of paying lip service to preservationist ideals. Wildlife in general was protected by law. Even outside the national parks, hunting was tightly regulated. In particular, poaching elephants in Kenya was as illegal as dealing cocaine in Brooklyn. With similar results.

What do you do when your laws are treated with contempt? Naturally, you get tough on crime. That is what voters want. That is what lobbyists want. And that is what they got. In 1988, Kenya's president ordered that poachers be shot on sight. Forty-one suspected

poachers were killed in the next eight months. No park rangers were killed. In Zimbabwe, with the same shoot-to-kill policy, one hundred and forty-five suspected poachers were killed between 1984 and 1991. Four rangers were killed in the same time frame.

The trouble is, when the score in favor of the game wardens is forty-one to zero in one country and one hundred and forty-five to four in another, it begins to seem absurd to think the alleged poachers are well-armed, war-hardened mercenaries, and indeed they were not. In fact, it was average rural peasants who were being shot. According to Richard Leakey, director of Kenya's wildlife department at the time, there were no more than a hundred hard-core poachers in Kenya and for the most part, their identities were known (p. 18).ⁱⁱ Many of them were wildlife department rangers. By some accounts, over a third of the rhinos poached in the 1970s, when the population crashed from twenty thousand to under one thousand, were taken by members of the wildlife department itself (p. 134).ⁱⁱⁱ It occurs to me that if you are a game warden and some hard-luck farmer chasing a stray goat accidentally catches you sawing tusks off an elephant you have poached, it is awfully convenient to have, in effect, a legal right to shoot him. You have the carcass right there as proof that he was poaching. (You can claim he must have had a confederate who escaped with the tusks.) However we explain the statistics, though, the fact remains that the shoot-to-kill policy was an extreme response—a reactionary response—and it did not work. Lots of farmers were getting shot, yet all sides agree that poaching was escalating.

What else could you do? One suggestion: regulate trade in ivory. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species determined in 1977 that elephants were not yet an endangered species but would become so if the ivory trade were not brought under control.

The Convention proposed that each exporting country establish self-imposed quotas on ivory exports, based on sustainable off-take—a level that would maintain existing populations.

What happened? To give one example, in 1986, Somalia voluntarily limited its export quota to seventeen thousand tusks per year. The odd thing is that Somalia had only six thousand elephants to begin with. Where were all those tusks coming from? Probably Kenya, its neighbor to the southwest.

If *regulating* commerce in ivory does not work, how about *banning* it? The case against a ban is this: Elephant populations in many countries were not decreasing, and were in fact near carrying capacity. Ivory was an important source of revenue for conservation programs. In theory, at least, legal exports from countries like South Africa dampen demand for poached ivory from countries like Kenya where elephants are threatened. For better or worse, these considerations failed to carry the day. The World Wide Fund for Nature and the African Wildlife Foundation originally opposed a ban for the reasons just mentioned, but then changed their minds. Bonner suspects that the reason they changed their minds was that they could not afford to pass up the millions of dollars they stood to gain through highly publicized campaigns to ban ivory.^{iv}

Here is a different issue. Even if the ivory ban eliminated poaching entirely, the wildlife would still be disappearing (p. 212). In Theodore Roosevelt's time, Africa's human population was 100 million. Now it is 450 million. As Bonner puts it, "People were once an island in a sea of wildlife. Now wildlife survives in parks that are islands in an ocean of people" (p. 8). Competition for water, disruption of migration routes, and farmers defending crops (and their families) against marauding wildlife will decimate wildlife with or without

poaching. Clearly, the poaching has to stop, but in the long run, that will not be enough to save the elephants. Whether we like it or not, the elephants will not survive except by sharing the land with people, which means their long-term survival depends on whether the people of Africa can afford to share. Poaching is just one symptom of this larger problem.

The Larger Problem

As Laura Westra tells us, “An Arab proverb says, Before the palm tree can be beautiful, our bellies must be full of dates. It is a truism, as indeed survival comes before aesthetic enjoyment. Unfortunately environmental concern is seen as aesthetic preference rather than urgently needed for survival.”^v Accordingly, the view that environmental concern is a mere luxury is unjustified. However, there is a crucial complication: people like us, for whom short-term survival is not an issue, can afford to treat environmental concern as an urgent priority; people who can barely make ends meet from one day to the next cannot. That is true here, and in Africa as well. Being able to think in terms of long-term survival is itself a luxury of a kind, and not one that everyone can afford. So, Westra has a point when she calls it a mistake to see environmental issues as a luxury. At the same time, it also would be a mistake to ignore the fact that environmental concern falls by the wayside in a personal crunch. From an individual perspective, the survival of one’s family comes first. Compared to that, environmental concern is indeed a luxury, and the rest of us do not have the luxury of ignoring that point.

Presumably, there are exceptions to this general rule. For example, Ramachandra Guha cringes at depicting environmental concern as a “full stomach” phenomenon and makes note of peasant movements against deforestation and industrial pollution in India.^{vi} Guha’s point is

well-taken, but it bears adding that, as Guha himself stresses, “environmental protection is of least concern to most of these groups. Their main concern is about the use of the environment and who should benefit from it.”^{vii} Thus, even if our own attitude is one of deep and unconditional reverence for wilderness, we have to be aware that other people may have, in their own eyes, more pressing things to think about. If we really care about wilderness, we cannot just look at it through our own eyes. Part of our job is to help create the kind of society in which, for other people, from their perspectives, respecting wilderness is worth the cost. We can say preservation is morally right; therefore the Maasai tribes are morally obligated to preserve; therefore we should not have to bribe them to do what they are obligated to do. They should just do it. If we say that, though, we are kidding ourselves. Under such circumstances, David Western (current director of the Kenyan Wildlife Service) observes, “the African farmer’s enmity toward elephants is as visceral as western mawkishness is passionate.”^{viii}

Like us, the people of Africa care for their natural heritage when they can afford to do so, when rewards for doing so go to them and not just to others, and when they know how to do so. Some of them have been practicing wise use for a long time, killing wildlife when it threatens their families, hunting it for food, and for sport as well. When we try to impose our preservationist ideals on local villagers who have to live with wildlife, we risk starting a war between locals and wildlife, a war that both sides lose. The problem is that preservation ethics does not allow the local people to profit from wildlife, and not allowing people to profit from wildlife effectively pits people against wildlife, which is bad for wildlife as well as the local people. Kreuter and Simmons say that, because elephants “compete directly with humans for use of fertile land, we believe elephants will continue to be eliminated unless they provide . . .

direct personal benefits to the people who incur the cost of co-existing with them. If the western preservationists do not respect the need for Africans to benefit from their resources, they will one day stand justly accused of promoting rather than abating the demise of Africa's elephants."^{ix} Our own experiences and our conversations with a dozen people from five African countries suggests that Kreuter and Simmons are right, and that the hard choice in southern Africa is not so much between people and wildlife as between a pragmatic humanism that benefits both and an idealistic environmentalism that benefits neither. When it comes to African wildlife, preservation ethics runs into a problem. In a nutshell, preservationism does not preserve. It thereby fails by its own lights. We need alternatives. It turns out that there are many. Some are working.

Wise Use Alternatives

Namibia's Auxiliary Guard

In several countries, elephant numbers are increasing. Is it because of the ivory ban? That seems reasonable, but it does not explain why the numbers in some countries were increasing even before the ban. Nor does it explain why the numbers have increased only in some countries, not others. One variable that separates countries is their success in controlling poaching. (And successful countries seem to be those that see poaching as a symptom of more fundamental problems.) In contrast to Kenya, Namibia's Kaokoveld region, for example, is doing fairly well. In 1982, a conservation officer named Garth Owen-Smith diagnosed Namibia's problem as follows. Local villagers once had customs that effectively limited their own hunting activities to sustainable levels. Then foreign hunters started showing up in large

numbers. It was a classic tragedy of the commons. Self-restraint seemed pointless, and villagers did not restrain themselves. They were helping to destroy wildlife and were destroying their own future in the process, and it was partly their fault. Somehow, the villagers had to reverse the deterioration of their own social norms, and they had to do something about trespassing poachers from outside. To western environmentalists, one obvious solution was to shoot the villagers (after all, they were poaching), but that had been tried elsewhere and Owen-Smith felt a different strategy was called for. Instead of shooting the villagers, he asked them for help.

He asked village headmen to assemble troops of auxiliary guards to act as neighborhood watch organizations. These watchdog organizations radically reduced poaching by outsiders, and also provided an institutional framework that made it easier to reassert community standards and re-establish norms of self-restraint. It was a simple idea, but it worked. Five years later, Owen-Smith went further. By then elephants, lions, and other animals were returning to the Kaokoveld, and with them came the tourists. The plan was to sell crafts to visitors who were coming through mainly to see wildlife and also to tax visitors for overnight stays within their territory. Both sources of income ultimately are tied to wildlife, so incentives to preserve are put in place (p. 33).

Does the program demean the animals? Perhaps, but we should keep in mind that we are not talking here about locking them up in zoos. Elephants have their value to the local people to the extent that they are wild and free and living in a natural setting. That is what the tourists (and hunters) are paying to see.

Revenue Sharing

To Westerners, the commercial value of tourism is a panacea (p. 218). Tourism could indeed help, but it depends on how the money is distributed. In Kenya, Richard Leakey announced in 1990 that twenty-five percent of entrance fees would go to local Maasai tribes (p. 222). Involving the Maasai is crucial, since eighty percent of Kenya's wildlife lives outside of its parks, and much of it is migratory. Thus, it is imperative that local farmers and herdsmen tolerate big animals coming and going, circulating among seasonal food and water supplies. And they were tolerant, after they started to get some of the money. In fact, the Maasai now use some of their share to hire their own wardens to track and protect animals outside the park—a remarkable change of attitude.

In Zambia, businesses that cater to the tourist industry take a percentage of their annual gross revenues and distribute it in equal shares amongst their entire staff. Accordingly, everyone you meet who is involved in the tourism industry, from janitors and dishwashers to maids and managers, directly profits from every dollar you spend, and thus is personally committed to making their business as attractive as possible to tourists. And since unspoiled land and especially wildlife is what draws the tourists, they have a personal interest in conservation as well.^x

In Botswana, the Moremi Game Reserve was created in 1964—the first wildlife area to be set aside by tribal chiefs rather than by colonial powers. Licenses for doing business in the Reserve are allocated according to competitive bids. Winning bids receive a five year lease, renewable up to two times for a total of fifteen years maximum. From a European or North American perspective, it makes no sense at first, since it undercuts incentives to make long

term investments in durable infrastructure. In Botswana, though, it may prove a brilliant solution to a vexing problem. Botswana needs foreign investment, but it does not want to find itself owned by white foreigners. So, under the current leasing arrangement, foreigners are investing and building infrastructure, but their buildings are flimsy shacks (with wooden rather than concrete foundations, for example). The roads are dirt trails built for Jeeps. In other words, investors are planning not to leave much behind when they leave, and as a result they seem to be building in a way that minimizes their environmental impact on the Reserve. Meanwhile, native Botswanan students (now about twenty years old) are being sent abroad to study tourism, management, ecology, and so on, returning home during the tourist season to work in the national parks as tour guides, assistant managers, and so on. Non-native entrepreneurs will help get Botswana's tourist industry going, and the hope is that, after they make a quick profit and a graceful exit, a generation of internationally trained and locally experienced Botswanans (who by that time will be about thirty-five years old) will be ready to take over.^{xi} We will see.

Tanzania's Bounty Hunters

In the Maswa Preserve, near Serengeti, Robin Hurt once led hunting safaris. Tanzania banned hunting in 1973, so Hurt went elsewhere. Tanzania legalized hunting again in 1984. Robin Hurt came back in 1985. During that twelve year moratorium on hunting, the wildlife virtually disappeared. Why? Because of poachers. Without licensed hunters to keep poachers in line, poachers ran amok.

But what is the difference between a poacher and a hunter? A hunter is just a poacher by another name, no? In fact, the difference is enormous. Hunters hunt with rifles. In Tanzania, poachers hunt with *snares*, and snares are a disaster for the wildlife (p. 236). The people of Makao, for example, were laying snares around water holes, or along timeworn paths to water holes, or they would cut new paths in the bushes and lay snares along those. Robin Hurt found twenty lion skulls in one snare line. He found snare lines that ran for two miles. More often than not, the animal caught is not what the poacher wants. Even if it is, vultures or hyenas often get to the animal before the poacher does. Snare-hunting is catastrophically wasteful from an ecological perspective, but from a poacher's perspective it is a lot easier than hunting with bow and arrow. The Makao switched to snares.^{xii}

When Hurt resumed operations in 1985, he began a casual anti-poaching effort, picking up snares as he went, in his spare time. Gradually realizing the magnitude of the problem, he concluded that the Makao had to be enlisted. How? Well, why not just pay them to turn in snares and poachers? Here, too, I would have worried about incentive problems. (If Hurt pays too much for the snares, won't people respond by making more snares?) Still, it was an idea worth trying. Hurt raised enough money to try it. It worked (p. 249).

Zimbabwe's Local Autonomy

There have been problems in Zimbabwe, as in other countries, with wildlife molesting villagers, to the point where villagers came to feel that government wildlife protection was persecuting people for the sake of the animals. And they were basically right. One major effect of the bans on commerce in wildlife was to prevent locals from making significant

money. “It was clear that to the local people, the wildlife was simply a nuisance. Elephants and other large herbivores raided their meager crops and sometimes even trampled their huts, while lions and other large carnivores occasionally preyed on their domestic stock. The wild animals often moved into the communal lands from national parks and other protected areas, but because the locals saw no direct benefit from these areas, they saw no reason to protect this errant game.”^{xiii} Wildlife groups had failed to ask: What could make it *rational* for villagers to choose wildlife over cattle?

Today there is an answer. Shortly after Zimbabwe gained political independence in 1980, its Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management concluded that conventional agricultural practices were ecologically and economically unsound throughout much of Zimbabwe. (The soil is not right, and there is not enough water.) The best use of the land was as a reservoir for wildlife. The Department also realized that the problem would be solved only if it were handed over to the local people. Over a period of years, the Department created the CAMPFIRE program. They surveyed community areas, assessed wildlife populations, and came to conclusions about what sort of numbers could be considered surplus game. They then gave local communities a nearly free hand in deciding what to do with the surplus.

Local communities were granted authority to cull herds, sell hunting permits, or set up tourist ventures, and since 1992 they have been allowed to keep eighty percent of the money. (The rest goes to wildlife management and rural district administration.) They put some of that money in a fund for compensating farmers when lions take their goats or elephants trample their crops, which defuses much of the resentment of wildlife. In some districts, rangers periodically hunt impala and sell meat to local villagers at a price that covers cost of the hunt,

making villagers less dependent on cattle as a source of protein. The issue is not just money, but self-sufficiency. Decisions are made in the village square. In that setting, people have more knowledge, more understanding, more voice. There is less room for corruption. Decision-making is more efficient and more equitable.

David Holt-Biddle notes that for Tshikwarakwara, a village in southeastern Zimbabwe, “Poaching and illegal hunting were the order of the day, the general opinion being that these were just nuisance animals and the only people to benefit from them were the white hunters, usually from abroad.” In the words of a local official, with the advent of CAMPFIRE, “the poaching and illegal hunting have stopped completely, because everyone in the community is a policeman now.”^{xiv}

A note of caution: there are programs in southern Africa that call themselves community-based but merely gesture at sharing revenue and at granting communities authority to set local policy. Such programs do not work.^{xv} Political corruption in Africa is deep and pervasive, and there is no magic cure for it. So far, though, CAMPFIRE seems to be working. “The foundation of community empowerment lies in devolution of management decisions to the local level. Just giving the communities economic resources from wildlife is not CAMPFIRE. In CAMPFIRE, the concept of community empowerment means actually giving the community the power to decide on the allocation of these resources.”^{xvi} As of 1994, there were twenty-two CAMPFIRE districts, comprising nearly half the country. As of 1999, when I was Zimbabwe, there were thirty-seven such districts, comprising well over half (and containing 56% of the country’s population), and much of the land in those districts is reserved for wildlife. A pamphlet published by the CAMPFIRE Association says,

Today, the total land mass devoted to wildlife conservation is more than 33% whereas only 13% is officially designated as such in the form of Protected Areas. Most of these wildlands are being set aside by rural communities motivated by the actual or anticipated benefits from their midst—wilderness resources are paying their way to survival! In the immediate period before the introduction of CAMPFIRE, Protected Areas were in danger of becoming ecological islands, threatening the maintenance of genetic and species diversity. CAMPFIRE has re-opened traditional migration routes of animals within the community, thus making a contribution to the preservation of biodiversity and the natural environment.^{xvii}

In the village of Masoka, in 1993, only a few years after launching their own local CAMPFIRE program, thirty-five percent of Masoka's household heads reported their primary employment to be a direct result of the program, mainly through safari camps.^{xviii} Enough money came in from hunting that villagers turned their land over to wildlife rather than grazing cattle. This is crucial because the bigger threat to wildlife tends to be cattle, not hunting. Cattle crowds out wildlife. (Actually, pastoral herds are one problem; farms and ranches are another. Nomadic Maasai herdsmen compete with wildlife for space and water, but at least they do not cut off migration routes by erecting fences or otherwise defending their turf.^{xix})

Villages (directly or through tour guides) sell elephant hunting licenses. Hunters currently pay as much as \$30,000 for the privilege. It is a lot of money in a country where the per capita annual income is around \$2000. As of 1999, when I was in Zimbabwe, there were

thirty-seven such districts, occupying well over half of the country (and containing 56 percent of the country's population), and much of the land in those districts was reserved for wildlife. (There is a sad ending to this encouraging tale, though. Within a year of my visit, Zimbabwe became one of the world's most brutal dictatorships, its economy shattered. So-called war veterans were authorized first to resettle the lands of evicted white farmers. Having eaten everything they could find on once-productive farms, these people are now rumored to be settling in the national parks, presumably poaching the wildlife. Little news escapes, and it remains to be seen whether or to what extent CAMPFIRE has survived the carnage.)

What about the morality of sport hunting? Is it something a sane person would do? Winston Churchill once shot a rhinoceros, but failed to kill it. The wounded rhino charged. The hunting party opened fire. The rhino kept coming into a hail of bullets, swerving aside at the last moment before more bullets finally brought it down. Churchill later wrote that, even in the midst of the charge, "There is time to reflect with some detachment that, after all, we it is who have forced the conflict by an unprovoked assault with murderous intent upon a peaceful herbivore; that if there is such a thing as right and wrong between man and beast—and who shall say there is not?—right is plainly on his side."^{xx}

I grew up on a farm, in a family of hunters, but I never joined in. I loved to shoot at targets, but I was never able to make sense of killing sentient beings for fun. Perhaps you feel the same way. And yet, we should hesitate before concluding that regular tourism is benign whereas hunting is destructive. Actually, tourism may do more damage than hunting relative to the money it brings in. Why? Mainly because, dollar for dollar, hunting does not need as

much infrastructure as tourism does. Hunters in jeeps do not use precious water the way tourist hotels do, and do not demand wilderness-fragmenting highways the way tourist hotels do.

Animal Rights

I have been talking about selling hunting licenses as an alternative to grazing cattle that compete with wildlife for space. As things stand, though, it sometimes is necessary to cull elephant herds for straightforwardly ecological reasons—to preserve habitat, other animal species, and even the elephants themselves. In the Volcans National Park in Rwanda, a choice had to be made between elephants and gorillas. As the elephants deplete food sources in the park, they normally migrate, coming back only when the park has replenished itself. As human populations increase and human settlements surround the parks, though, elephants are forced to turn back into the parks, destroying habitat for everything else in the park as well as for themselves. To prevent that, Rwanda's two remaining elephant herds, about seventy animals each, were wiped out in 1973.^{xxi}

Uganda also culled elephant herds for ecological reasons. Not Kenya. The elephant population in Kenya's Tsavo Park had reached forty thousand in the 1960s. "Some conservationists and wildlife officials wanted to cull three thousand elephants. Others argued that man should do nothing, that nature should be allowed to take its course" (p. 104). Preservationists prevailed, but during a subsequent drought, six to nine thousand elephants died of starvation, and they took several hundred rhinos with them.^{xxii}

Today, the same thing is happening again, as we saw with our own eyes—especially in the Chobe and Moremi Game Reserves in Botswana and in Kruger National Park in South

Africa. In many places, there are far too many elephants, and they are ruining the woodland. They are leaving both themselves and all the other wildlife without viable habitat. Mopalo Setswantsho has been taking people on hiking and canoe trips into the Okavango Delta in the interior of Botswana since 1983 and has lived in the area all his life. I asked him whether there were fewer animals now. He answered that, on the contrary, there are more animals now, but the trees are disappearing.

Do we have the right to put a stop to it? Animal rights organizations say no. Their approach is individualistic rather than holistic. They focus on each and every animal rather than on larger questions about species or habitat. Their view is particularly salient in the case of elephants. When rangers cull elephants, they take out whole families in order to avoid leaving behind orphans and other remnants of shattered families. The horrible thing is that, under favorable conditions, elephants can hear the sound of a culling operation up to thirty kilometers away, and elephants are smart—smart enough to understand and share the terror of the ones being shot. Cynthia Moss, who has written fascinating and convincing books about what it is like to be an elephant, says elephants deserve something better than to be exterminated like rodents. She has a point.^{xxiii}

Lawrence Johnson, though, argues that there are times when “the interests of species are not adequately protected by a concern for individuals.”^{xxiv} The individualistic animal rights position is powerful, given the nature of elephants, but it leaves us in a horrible quandary, for the price of absolute rights may be extinction. Nonetheless, elephants are not like zebra. They are not the kind of creature that we have a right to treat as mere means. Cynthia Moss (p. 226) said she would rather see elephants go extinct than see individual animals murdered for the

sake of population control, and she is not alone. If elephants had a voice in the matter, perhaps they would thank Moss for her stand. Perhaps not.

Personal and Interpersonal Morality

I asked what makes it wrong to cut down a Redwood in order to use the stump as a dance floor, or to shoot an elephant in order to use the tusks for ivory. Do we have an answer? We may have more than one. I say that partly because, in my view, morality is more than one thing. One part of morality ranges over the subject of personal aspiration—which goals we should spend our lives trying to achieve. Another part of morality ranges over the subject of interpersonal constraint—especially which socially or institutionally embedded constraints we ought to respect as we pursue our goals in a social setting.^{xxv} In those terms, then, I still believe in preservationism as part of a morality of personal aspiration. Committing ourselves to preservationist ideals—to reverence for nature and to a policy of “no use at all” at least in some contexts—is one way of giving ourselves something to live for.

I also believe a preservationist “no use at all” policy can work among people who share a commitment to preservationist ideals. What I mean by this is that when people accept the ideals behind a set of institutional constraints, and individually and collectively commit themselves to living within those constraints on behalf of those ideals, the institution has a decent chance of functioning in such a way as actually to further those ideals.

However, I have come to realize that preservationism often and predictably does not work in the context of a social arrangement in which the cost of upholding preservationist ideals has to be born by people who do not embrace those ideals. Even given that

preservationism is acceptable as a personal ideal, it remains a bad idea to create institutions that depend upon people who do not share that ideal to take responsibility for realizing it. (Ramachandra Guha goes so far as to say our foisting preservationist ideals on third world countries is a form of cultural imperialism.^{xxvi})

Some of our most beloved environmental heroes, such as Aldo Leopold, were unrepentant hunters. They saw hunting as part of an environmentally benign overall pattern. Even if they were wrong, and even if their philosophy has no place within an enlightened morality of personal aspiration, it would be neither personally enlightened nor environmentally benign for us to interfere with hunting by other people if and when such hunting is the heart of a community's way of allowing people and wildlife to live together in some semblance of harmony.

i. Raymond Bonner, *At the Hand of Man*, New York: Vintage (1993). Unless otherwise noted, page references in the text are to this book. Bonner's sources include interviews, memos, minutes of committee meetings, and newsletters. His reporting is consistent with my own experience and with other sources I have been able to check, except where otherwise noted.

ii. Bonner's source is a publicly circulated report by Leakey to the U.S. State Department in 1989.

iii. If it seems astonishing both that this could be true and that Leakey would publicly admit it, consider two things.

First, there was pervasive corruption at the highest levels of government, allowing well-connected poachers to operate with impunity. Second, many rangers were paid less than a living wage, so it was need, not greed, that drove some of them to poach. Thus, Leakey sometimes had little choice but to put up with poaching within his own ranks. See also David Cumming and Raoul du Toit, "The African Elephant and Rhino Group Nyeri Meeting," *Pachyderm*, 11 (1989) pp. 4-6.

iv. It is now about ten years since Bonner wrote, and in hindsight it seems clearer that the ivory ban did reduce poaching by depressing prices. Demand for ivory in the United States was almost completely choked off, not

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- because border officials have the power to stop the influx of contraband but rather because ivory's main value is as a status symbol, and ivory today is too politically incorrect to be much of a status symbol, especially when it is illegal. Since sales of ivory have resumed (twenty tons each to Japan from Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Namibia), though, the rumor is that black market prices have begun to climb again. Perhaps it is because sixty tons is not very much, and the gesture at legalization may be doing more to increase demand than to increase supply.
- v. Laura Westra, "The Principle of Integrity and *The Economy of the Earth*," in W. Michael Hoffman, Robert Frederick, & Edward S. Petry, editors, *The Corporation, Ethics, and the Environment*, New York: Quorum Books (1990) p. 232.
- vi. Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third-World Critique," *Environmental Ethics*, 11 (1989) pp. 79-81.
- vii. p. 81. Guha here is quoting Anil Agarwal, "Human-Nature Interactions In a Third World Country," *The Environmentalist*, 6 (1986) p. 167.
- viii. David Western, "The Balance of Nature," *Wildlife Conservation*, (March/April, 1993) p. 52.
- ix. Urs P. Kreuter and Randy T. Simmons, "Who Owns the Elephants?" *Wildlife in the Marketplace*, edited by Terry Anderson and Peter J. Hill, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield (1995) p. 161.
- x. Source: Conversation (Livingstone, Zambia, July 28, 1999) with Phillip Roberts, a native of Zambia and proprietor of Wilderness Wheels Africa, a company that specializes in wildlife tours for customers in wheelchairs.
- xi. Source: Conversation (Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana, July 24 and 26, 1999) with Isrea Batlanang, a native of Botswana, assistant manager of Oddballs' Lodge in Moremi Game Reserve. Batlanang also is studying for a college degree in Tourism at Semmering University in Austria.
- xii. Even on private reserves, snare-poaching can be a problem. Khame Game Reserve in Zimbabwe is of moderate size, about ten thousand acres, and it employs five full-time rangers, which makes it reasonably well-policed compared to most national parks. Even so, when we visited the manager, Brianna Carne, she said they had caught a snare poacher on their property the previous week, and rangers had so far picked up ten snares, fearing they might yet find another two hundred.

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- xiii. David Holt-Biddle, "CAMPFIRE: An African Solution To An African Problem," *Africa Environment and Wildlife*, 2 (1994) 33-35, here p. 33.
- xiv. An interview of Jacomea Nare, as reported in Holt-Biddle, p. 35.
- xv. Alexander N. Songorwa, "Community-Based Wildlife Management in Tanzania: Are the Communities Interested?" *World Development*, 27 (1999) 2061-79.
- xvi. Gordin Edwin Matzke and Nontokoza Nabane, "Outcomes of a Community Controlled Wildlife Utilization Program in a Zambezi Valley Community," *Human Ecology*, 24 (1996) 65-85, here p. 73.
- xvii. See <http://www.campfire-zimbabwe.org> or write campfir@id.co.zw for further information.
- xviii. Matzke and Nabane, p. 80.
- xix. See Cynthia Moss, *Elephant Memories*, New York: William Morrow (1988) p. 209, 301.
- xx. Winston S. Churchill, *My African Journey*, London: Hodder and Stoughton (1908) p. 17.
- xxi. J. C. Haigh, I.S.C. Parker, D.A. Parkinson, and A.L. Archer, "An Elephant Extermination," *Environmental Conservation*, 6 (1979) 305-10.
- xxii. The figure of nine thousand is from Bonner. The figure of six thousand is from Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology For the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Oxford University Press (1990) p. 18.
- xxiii. Moss, p. 317.
- xxiv. Lawrence E. Johnson, *A Morally Deep World*, New York: Cambridge University Press (1991) p. 173.
- ^{xxv} See David Schmitz, *Rational Choice and Moral Agency*, Princeton University Press (1995).
- xxvi. Guha, p. 55-56 in the original article.