

# MORALITY'S PROGRESS

*Essays on Humans,  
Other Animals,  
and the Rest of Nature*

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*In memory  
of my father  
Dale Walter Jamieson*

*and  
for my mother  
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## Zoos Revisited

The possibility of perpetual reinvention is deeply embedded in the American psyche. Waiters can become movie stars, gangsters can be transformed into respectable businessmen, and corrupt White House officials can return as fundamentalist preachers. One California governor, who signed the most liberal abortion law in the nation, became a fiercely born-again anti-abortionist; another former California governor, one of the leading political fund-raisers of his generation, ran for president on a platform that denounced political fund-raising as the root of all evil. Despite its attractions, reinvention is not always successful. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, the title character emerges from a shady past to assume the life of a Long Island gentleman. Yet despite the trappings of wealth and power, his new identity is fragile. In the end he succumbs to his past.

In their drive to reinvent themselves, American zoos are very American. Early zoos were explicitly meant to demonstrate and celebrate the domination of nature by man. They included all sorts of exotics, both human and non-human.<sup>1</sup> As the control of zoos moved from rich and powerful individuals to communities and governments, they were increasingly seen as sources of urban amusement. But in these enlightened times many zoo professionals no longer see amusement and entertainment as roles that are worthy of zoos. Indeed, in this spirit, the New York Zoological Society has abolished its zoos;

Discussions with many people have affected my views about zoos. I thank the participants in the conference Animal Welfare and Conservation: Ethical Paradoxes in Modern Zoos and Aquariums, at which a version of this essay was presented, especially Bryan Norton, Michael Hutchins, and Terry Maple for inviting me to participate, and Don Lindburg, who was an intellectual and moral inspiration. Over the years I have learned a great deal about various topics touched on in this essay from Marc Bekoff, Anna Goebbel, Sue Townsend, and John Wortman. Despite my debts to all of these people, I alone am responsible for the views that I have expressed.

<sup>1</sup> For a moving account of an African Pygmy who was confined to the New York City Zoo, see Bradford and Bloom (1992).

however, wildlife conservation parks have risen, phoenix-like, to replace them. In their current reinvention zoos are being pitched as the last best hope for endangered wildlife. For advocates of zoos, as for Jay Gatsby, the past is evil but fortunately always behind us. The present is good, and the future promises to be even better—assuming the money holds out.

Critics of zoos rightly see this attitude as self-serving and disingenuous. Most zoos are still in the business of entertainment rather than species preservation. Despite protestations to the contrary, most zoos are still more or less random collections of animals kept under largely bad conditions. Although the best zoos have been concerned to position themselves as environmental heroes, they have done little to promote this ethic in the zoo industry as a whole. There are many bad exhibits and many bad zoos, but not much is being done to shut them down. Even the best zoos have problems with preventable mortality and morbidity due to accidents or abuse and are too often in league, wittingly or unwittingly, with people whose idea of a good animal is one that turns a quick profit. The rhetoric of science, favoured by the best people in the best zoos, has not yet penetrated the reality of most zoos and indeed carries with it new possibilities for abuse. Even now, with the bad old days presumably behind us, there is not much ground for complacency.

Still, it is clear that zoos are changing. They are becoming more naturalistic in environment, focusing more on species preservation and scientific research and less on entertainment. Zoos in the future, at least the better ones, will increasingly become more like parks.

Parks and preserves are changing as well. They are becoming more like zoos. In 1987 Kenya's Lake Nakuru National Park was completely fenced.<sup>2</sup> It is only a matter of time until large East African mammals are managed in much the same way as domestic animals, as has already been suggested by the World Conservation Union.<sup>3</sup> This tendency towards management is also at work in the national parks in this country.

What will become of wild nature in this proliferation of miniparks or mega-zoos?<sup>4</sup> Wild nature may be done for. Human population growth remains out of control. The effects of human consumption and production are modifying fundamental planetary systems in what may be irreversible ways. We are probably already committed to a climate change that will have profound effects on both nature and human society. Extremely remote areas in the arctic and antarctic regions are suffering the effects of human-induced ozone depletion. Today no part of the planet is unaffected by human action. Nature may not

<sup>2</sup> Conway (1990).

<sup>3</sup> See Conway (1995); Hutchins *et al.* (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Conway (1990).

yet be tamed, but she is no longer wild.<sup>5</sup> The evolution of every animal species, to some degree, is now affected by human action.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most dramatic effects of human action is the epidemic of extinctions currently sweeping the earth. Increasingly zoos have attempted to position themselves as the guardians of wild nature, as the boy with his thumb in the dike trying to hold back the flood-waters. I do not believe that zoos can successfully play this role. Establishing genetic warehouses is not the same as preserving wild animals. Highly managed theme parks are not wild nature.

Although in the bad old days zoos may have made their contributions to extinction, they are not responsible for the current wave. Nor are they directly to blame for our pathetic response to it. What is to blame is the peculiar moral schizophrenia of a culture that drives a species to the edge of extinction and then romanticizes the remnants. Until a species is on the brink of extinction it seems to have little claim on our moral sensibility.

Consider the northern spotted owl. Most people probably agree with the Denver newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain News*, which editorialized (16 March 1992) that loggers need jobs as much as the spotted owls need trees. This is what passes for a moderate position, carefully balancing the unsustainable lifestyle of a few thousand humans against the very existence of another form of life. Once the owl is extinct or a few stragglers have been moved indoors, people will sing a different song. No steps will be too extreme to save this endangered species.

In the bad old days I published a paper with the subtle, highly nuanced title "Against Zoos" (Essay 11). For my effort I was virtually accused of child abuse by a local television station. Its correspondents interviewed children visiting the Denver Zoo, eliciting their reactions to some pointy-headed philosopher who wanted to take their fun away. The responses were predictable. A column in the *Chicago Tribune* (28 April 1991) said that my ideas were so absurd that "only an intellectual could believe them". No less a journal than *Time Magazine* (24 June 1991) called me a "zoophobe" and suggested that I am indifferent to the fate of endangered species.

What I tried to do in that much-maligned essay was to set forth as rationally as possible the case against zoos. I examined the arguments that have been given on their behalf: that they provide amusement, education, opportunities for scientific research, and help in preserving species. I saw some merit in each argument, but in the end I concluded that these benefits

were outweighed by the moral presumption against keeping animals in captivity. I also claimed that despite the best intentions of zoo personnel, the profound message of zoos is that it is permissible for humans to dominate animals, for the entire experience of a zoo is framed by the fact of captivity.

Serious people have taken issue with my claims and arguments.<sup>7</sup> Because some of my critics place more weight on the role of zoos in preserving endangered species than I do, I want to discuss that issue in some detail. However, I first want to reconsider whether there is a presumption against keeping animals in captivity, since this claim is foundational to my argument against zoos.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. IS THERE A PRESUMPTION AGAINST KEEPING ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY?

In Essay 11 I argued that there is a presumption against keeping animals in captivity. My argument was rather intuitive. Keeping animals in captivity usually involves restricting their liberty in ways that deny them many goods including gathering their own food, developing their own social orders, and generally behaving in ways that are natural to them. In the case of many animals captivity also involves removing them from their native habitats and conditions. If animals have any moral standing at all, then it is plausible to suppose that depriving them of liberty is presumptively wrong, since an interest in liberty is central to most morally significant creatures.

My claim that there is such a presumption has recently been challenged.<sup>9</sup> If Leahy is correct in thinking that there is no such presumption, then there is no general reason for being opposed to zoos. The acceptability of keeping animals in captivity would turn entirely on a case-by-case examination of the conditions under which various animals are kept. Before considering Leahy's arguments against this presumption, let us first consider the view to which he is committed.

The idea that there is a presumption against keeping animals in captivity implies that it is not a matter of moral indifference whether animals are kept captive. But it carries no implication about how strong the presumption is.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Chiszar *et al.* (1990); Hutchins *et al.* (1995).

<sup>8</sup> Although I prefer to avoid the language of rights, my work on zoos has been greatly influenced by Rachels (1976/1989). For a good discussion of the concept of freedom, see Taylor (1986: 105–11). It should also be noted that for the purposes of this essay I use the terms 'liberty' and 'freedom' interchangeably.

<sup>9</sup> Leahy (1991).

<sup>5</sup> McKibben (1989).

<sup>6</sup> Borza and Jamieson (1990); Jamieson (1990); Essay 18.

People who agree that there is a presumption against keeping animals in captivity can disagree about the strength of the presumption or about whether it is permissible to keep an animal in captivity in a particular case. What Leahy is committed to is the view that everything else being equal, it is a matter of moral indifference as to whether animals are kept in captivity; we might as well flip a coin. I believe that this view is implausible.

Although it is difficult to perform this thought experiment, imagine that we could guarantee the same or better quality of life for an animal in a zoo than the animal would enjoy in the wild. Suppose further that there are no additional benefits to humans or animals that would be gained by keeping the animal in captivity. The only difference between these two cases that might be relevant is that in one case the animal is confined to a zoo and in the other case the animal is free to pursue his or her own life. Would we say that the fact of confinement is a morally relevant consideration? I believe that most people would say that it is, and that it would be morally preferable for the animal to be free rather than captive. In my opinion this shows that most of us believe that there is a moral presumption against keeping animals in captivity. That we believe that there is such a presumption is indicated in various ways. For example, sometimes it is said that keeping an animal in captivity is a privilege that involves assuming special obligations for the animal's welfare. This expresses the sense, I believe, that in confining an animal we are in some way wronging him or her, and thus owe him or her some compensation.

With this result in mind, let us consider Leahy's arguments. He appears to offer two. The first (following Hediger 1964) involves the claim that animals are not truly free in the wild. They are constrained by ecological and social pressures and are "struck down by natural predators and diseases which, quite reasonably, can be said to limit their freedom" (Leahy 1991: 242). Since animals are not truly free in the wild, keeping them in captivity does not deprive them of liberty. The second argument is a conceptual one. According to Leahy, animals do not have language and are not self-conscious; therefore they cannot make choices or raise objections. Since they cannot make choices or raise objections, they cannot be said to live their own lives. Since they cannot live their own lives, they can never really be free. Since animals can never really be free, confining them in zoos does not deprive them of their freedom.

The first argument is intended to show that as a matter of fact animals are not free in their natural habitats while the second argument is intended to show that animals can never be free under any circumstances. There is no presumption against keeping them in captivity because in neither case does captivity deprive them of something that they have in the wild.

We should see first that these arguments do not really question the view that there is a presumption against depriving animals of liberty. What these arguments are supposed to show is that animals do not or cannot have liberty, thus they are not deprived of it by captivity. If it could be shown that animals do have liberty in the wild but not in captivity, then Leahy might agree that there is a presumption against keeping animals in captivity on grounds that it deprives them of liberty. At least he has said nothing that counts against this view.

The core of the issue, then, is the plausibility of the common-sense view that animals lose their liberty when they are removed from the wild and kept in zoos. I affirm the common-sense view; Leahy denies it. Who is right?

Consider Leahy's second argument first. Two steps in the argument that invite objection are these: the claim that animals are not self-conscious, and the claim that self-consciousness or language is required for making choices.

The topic of self-consciousness is a difficult one. Philosophers and psychologists often use this concept in different ways. One approach, characteristic of Descartes and much of the philosophical tradition, associates self-consciousness with the ability to use language or other complex symbol systems. But even if it were agreed that the use of complex symbol systems is required for self-consciousness, it would appear that various primates and cetaceans satisfy this criterion and thus would be excluded from the scope of Leahy's conclusion.<sup>10</sup> For those animals who use complex symbol systems, Leahy would have no argument for supposing that they are not free in the wild. Thus with respect to those animals at least, my claim that there is a presumption in favour of liberty would appear to survive unscathed. A second approach, characteristic of work in cognitive ethology, regards attributions of self-consciousness as underwritten by such factors as behaviour, evolutionary continuity, and structural similarity. Researchers have argued that a wide range of behaviour in a variety of animals involves self-consciousness, including social play, deception, and vigilance.<sup>11</sup> Whichever approach is adopted, the claim that only humans are self-conscious appears doubtful.

The second dubious step in this argument involves the claim that self-consciousness is required for making choices. The philosopher's paradigm of choice may involve listing alternatives on a yellow pad with the pros and cons of each fully described in the margins, but this is only one way of making choices. Many of our choices are made without explicitly representing

<sup>10</sup> Herman and Morrel-Samuels (1990/1996); Savage-Rumbaugh and Brakke (1990/1996).

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell and Thompson (1986); Byrne and Whiten (1988); Griffin (1992); Essay 5.

alternatives and totting up pluses and minuses—for example, when we choose coffee rather than tea, hit the brake rather than the accelerator, or immediately agree to give a lecture in Iowa in response to a telephone call. In these kinds of cases it is hard to see exactly how self-consciousness is supposed to be involved. Moreover, important work on animal behaviour has purported to address such topics as mate choice,<sup>12</sup> habitat choice,<sup>13</sup> and the choice of nest sites.<sup>14</sup> For the most part this work has been done without presupposing that animals are self-conscious. It may be that these researchers misuse the term 'choice' or are simply wrong in supposing that animals make choices in these situations. However, I believe that it is more plausible to suppose that it is Leahy's claim that is false and that self-consciousness is not required for choice. Since at least two steps in Leahy's second argument appear dubious, it is plausible to suppose that the argument fails.

Leahy's first argument attempts to show not that animals cannot be free under any conditions but that as a matter of fact they are not free in the wild. The idea is that if they are not free in the wild, then they lose nothing when they are confined in zoos. The evidence for the claim that animals are not free in the wild is that they are constrained by ecological and social pressures and are struck down by natural predators and disease.

If pointing to ecological and social pressures were sufficient for showing that an animal is not free, it would prove too much, for all organisms, including humans, are constrained by ecological and social pressures. The most that this claim could establish is that social and ecological pressures restrict animals to such an extent that they are more free in captivity than they are in the wild.

Are animals more free in zoos than in the wild? On the face of it, this claim is wildly implausible. It is like saying that humans are more free in prison than on the street because they are not subject to the same pressures as people on the street. The argument seems to overlook the fact that social pressures exist in zoos as well as in the wild, and in many cases such pressures are more intense in zoos because individuals are inhibited from responding to them in the ways in which they would in the wild. But more important, even if it could be shown that caged animals, whether human or non-human, live longer than those who are uncaged, this would not provide evidence for the claim about freedom. Nor could the claim be established by showing that caged animals are happier than uncaged animals. Liberty is not the same as longevity or happiness, nor does it always manifest itself in these ways. Moreover, there is very

little evidence for supposing that captive animals live longer or are happier in zoos than they are in the wild. It seems plain that most animals have less freedom in zoos than in the wild. Indeed, the very point of systems of confinement is to deprive them of freedom.

For reasons that I have given it seems to me that Leahy's arguments fail. The common-sense position, that everything else being equal it is better for animals to be free, is vindicated. However, there is another line of argument that might be thought to be more challenging than those pursued thus far. It might be granted that there is a presumption of liberty with respect to animals who are born in the wild, but denied that there is any such presumption with respect to those who are born in captivity. It might be argued that captive-bred animals have never known freedom, so they are denied nothing by captivity.

In my view there is a presumption in favour of liberty with respect to all animals, whether bred in captivity or in the wild. Imagine humans who have never known liberty. Would it be plausible to deny that there is a presumption of liberty for them on the grounds that they do not miss what they have never known? An affirmative answer would be absurd. Indeed, we might think that the tragedy of their captivity is all the greater because they have never known liberty. Transferring these intuitions to non-human animals, we can see that there is a presumption in favour of liberty even with respect to animals born in captivity. Indeed, the presumption may even be stronger in their case. Still, some people would argue against this presumption, pointing out that many animals bred in captivity would not survive liberation, despite attempts at preparation. Their lives in nature would be nasty, brutish, and short. Even if this is true it fails to show that there is no presumption in favour of liberty for these animals. At most it shows that in these cases the presumption in favour of liberty is outweighed by concerns about the welfare of these animals. The presumption for liberty exists, but it may be wrong to release these animals into the wild.

What I have argued in this section is that a basic claim of Essay 11, that there is a presumption in favour of liberty for animals, still stands. The burden of proof rests on those who would confine animals in zoos. The most compelling reason for confining animals in zoos, in some people's eyes, is the need to preserve endangered species. It is to this justification that I now turn.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In a recent book Bostock agrees that there is a presumption against keeping animals in captivity, but claims that "we can go a long way towards providing good conditions in zoos" (1993: 50). For the presumption to be overcome however, it must be shown that the benefits of confining animals in zoos are greater than the burdens. This is not established by speculative claims about the possibility of creating good conditions for animals in zoos.

<sup>12</sup> Bateson (1983).

<sup>13</sup> Rosenzweig (1990/1996).

<sup>14</sup> Bekoff *et al.* (1989).

## 2. CAN ZOOS PRESERVE ENDANGERED SPECIES?

There are a number of arguments against zoos as meaningful sites for preserving endangered species. First, such preservation is needed, it is rightly pointed out, because we are losing species at an enormous rate. But although estimates differ and not all the facts are known, it is obvious that not more than a tiny fraction of these species can be preserved in zoos. Ehrlich and Ehrlich estimate that American zoos could preserve about one hundred mammals under the best conditions (1981: 211). Secondly, only a small number of the species preserved in zoos could ever be reintroduced into their natural habitats. Indeed most attempts at reintroduction have failed.<sup>16</sup> For many species, zoos are likely to be the last stop on the way to extinction. Finally, over many generations the genetic structure and behaviour of captive populations change. Captivity substitutes selection pressures imposed by humans, either intentionally or inadvertently, for those of an animal's natural habitat. Indeed, under some definitions of domestication, confining animals in zoos and breeding them in captivity transforms them into domesticated animals.<sup>17</sup> Whether we count zoo animals as domesticated or not, it is clear that in fifty, one hundred, or a thousand years we may not have the same animal that was placed in captivity, much less the animal that would have existed had it evolved in nature. Taken together these arguments show that the role that captive breeding and reintroduction can play in the preservation of endangered species is at best marginal. Thus the benefit of preservation is not significant enough to overcome the presumption against depriving an animal of its liberty.

Against arguments such as these,<sup>18</sup> it is sometimes objected that they are entirely hypothetical. Where are the data? it is sometimes asked, and then we hear anecdotes about species that have been saved by captive breeding programmes. Such arguments are made against Varner and Monroe by Hutchins and Wemmer, who go on to assert that "there are many problems facing captive breeding and reintroduction programs, but they are not insurmountable" (1991: 6). But how do they know? Where are the data that show that such problems are not insurmountable? Is this a scientific statement or the expression of a quasi-religious faith in the idea that humans have the ability to technofix everything, even the threatened extinction of other species?<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Beck (1995).

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Rodd (1990: 113); Clutton-Brock (1992); but see also Norton (1995b).

<sup>18</sup> Essay 11; Varner and Monroe (1990).

<sup>19</sup> Proponents of zoos seem especially given to making unsubstantiated, sweeping claims. Wolfe attacks my Essay 11 for failing to consider "that one function of zoos may be to help children make

The point is that demands for data can be made by either party to the dispute. The fact is that there are anecdotes on both sides, qualitative material that different people evaluate in different ways, but very little that looks like hard data. The sceptic about captive breeding programmes will say that the defender of zoos has the burden to show that such programmes can really be successful. If there is a presumption against keeping animals in captivity, then it is wrong to do so unless a case can be made that the benefits outweigh this presumption. From the perspective of a sceptic, an inconclusive argument on this point is one that the sceptic wins.

Defenders of zoos say that the burden is on the other side, for captive breeding keeps options open. True enough. We ought to keep options open, not only for ourselves but for future people as well. But at what cost? Unless the presumption that animals should not be kept in captivity can be overcome by the moral case for keeping options open, this observation does not carry much weight. It certainly does not establish a burden of proof.

There is another dimension to this dispute. The critics of zoos point out that breeding and reintroduction programmes can be extremely invasive, involving not just denials of liberty but sometimes pain and suffering for individuals. Defenders of zoos sometimes say that this suffering is for the good of the species. This is the manoeuvre that in Essay 11 I called sacrificing the interests of the lower-case gorilla for those of the upper-case Gorilla.

There is a lot of confusion about the concept of species and its proper role in our biological and moral thinking.<sup>20</sup> Yet law, policy, and common morality take the concept very seriously. An animal that is part of an endangered species may have millions spent to protect her, but if she is a member of an endangered subspecies or a hybrid she may be exterminated as a pest. Some of these issues are explored by May (1990), O'Brien and Mayr (1991), Vane-Wright *et al.* (1991), Geist (1992), and Rojas (1992).

One confusion in our biological thinking concerns the relation between variability and species diversity. Species diversity is one kind of variability but not the only kind. Within most species there is an enormous amount of

symbolic sense of the world around them". He then goes on to conclude. "Children learn to use their powers of fantasy and imagination—to love animals—by going to the zoo. Strip them of this rich source of their interpretive life and, as adults, they will likely be more unfeeling, not less" (Wolfe 1991: 116–17). This is all very nice, high-minded rhetoric, and may even be true. But what I claimed in Essay 11 is that there are very few data to support the educational claims that are made on behalf of zoos. Whether zoos indeed have the uplifting effects on children claimed by Wolfe is an empirical question. I ask again: where are the data?

<sup>20</sup> Ereshefsky (1992); Hargrove (1992).

variability—think of dogs or coyotes, for example.<sup>21</sup> The evolutionary story requires variability, but it is not clear that it requires a very strong conception of species. Richard Dawkins writes that “‘the species’ [is] an arbitrary stretch of continuously flowing river, with no particular reason to draw lines delimiting its beginning and end” (1986: 264). Darwin himself was quite conventionalist about the concept of species, writing that “I look at the term species, as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling one another” (Darwin 1859/1958: 67). The demotion of the concept of species from the exalted role that it played in Aristotelian biology was one consequence of the Darwinian revolution. Like other consequences of the Darwinian revolution, we are still struggling to grasp its full significance.<sup>22</sup>

Variability is important to us as well as to the evolutionary process. We value variability, but just as we often focus on the charismatic megafauna and overlook other creatures that are as important to nature, so we often fix on species variability as the only kind of diversity that matters. We compound the problem when we think that it is species to which we have obligations rather than the creatures themselves. This is an instance of the general fallacy of attributing to species the properties of individual creatures. Individual creatures have hearts and lungs; species do not. Individual creatures often have welfares, but species never do. The notion of a species is an abstraction; the idea of its welfare is a human construction. While there is something that it is like to be an animal there is nothing that it is like to be a species.

I am a Darwinian about the concept of species, but I am not callous about the survival of nature. I am as concerned about saving wild nature as any defender of zoo breeding programmes. But I believe that the only hope for doing this is to put large tracts of the earth's surface off-limits to human beings and to alter radically our present lifestyles.<sup>23</sup> I agree with Ehrenfeld that “the true prospects for conservation ultimately depend not on the conservation manipulations of scientists but on the overarching consideration of how many people there will be in the world in the next century, the way they live, and the ways in which they come to regard and use nature” (1991: 39).

I believe further that attempts at preserving wild nature through zoo breeding programmes are a cruel hoax. If zoo breeding programmes are successful

<sup>21</sup> Bekoff and Wells (1986).

<sup>22</sup> Dewey (1910); Rachels (1990).

<sup>23</sup> For this reason I endorse the general concepts put forward by the Wildlands Project, PO Box 455, Richmond VA 05477.

they will not preserve species but rather transform animals into exhibits in a living museum. “This is what used to exist in the wild”, we can say to our children while pointing at some rare creature alienated from her environment, “before the K-Mart and the biotechnology factory went in”. Zoo professionals like to say that they are the Noahs of the modern world and that zoos are their arks. But Noah found a place to land his animals where they could thrive and multiply. If zoos are like arks, then rare animals are like passengers on a voyage of the damned, never to find a port that will let them dock or a land in which they can live their lives in peace and freedom. If we are serious about preserving wild nature we must preserve the land, and not pretend that we can bring nature indoors.

In my darker moments I believe, not just that zoos are in the business of perpetuating fraud with their rhetoric about preserving animals, but that, knowingly or not, they are deeply implicated in causing the problem that they purport to be addressing. Zoo professionals are often eager to remove animals from the wild to more controlled environments where they can be studied. But as more and more animals are taken out of the wild, the case for preserving wild nature erodes. Why save a habitat if there is nothing to inhabit it? Advocates of zoos like to point out that they are not just in the business of removing animals from the wild, but increasingly they are also involved in trying to preserve animals in nature as well. Although zoos boast of their programmes in the developing world, very few can withstand scrutiny.<sup>24</sup> The truth is that very few zoos make meaningful attempts to preserve animals in nature, and most zoos spend more on publicity and public relations than they do on programmes involving animals. This is especially appalling because in many cases programmes to preserve animals *in situ* are relatively cheap. For example, the Bonobo Protection Fund estimates that the bonobo population in Zaire could be effectively protected for an initial investment of \$185,000 and \$60,000 per year thereafter. This is a small amount to spend for the protection of the rarest of ape species.

In my opinion we should have the honesty to recognize that zoos are for us rather than for the animals. Perhaps they do something to alleviate our sense of guilt for what we are doing to the planet, but they do little to help the animals we are driving to extinction. Our feeble attempts at preservation are a matter of our own interests, values, and preoccupations rather than

<sup>24</sup> *Newsweek* (12 April 1993) documents the ineffectiveness and corruption of various programmes to save endangered species, several of them involving major zoos. For a case study, see Schaller (1993).

acts of generosity towards those animals whom we destroy and then try to save. In so far as zoos distract us from the truth about ourselves and what we are doing to nature, they are part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

### 3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Much of what I have said may sound like an aggravating stew of idealism and curmudgeonliness. Hutchins and Wemmer speak for many people when they say that philosophers seem "more concerned with logical arguments than with practical solutions to real problems" (1991: 5). Although I wish non-philosophers were more concerned with logical arguments, I sympathize with their sentiments. It is a fact that despite the arguments that I and others have given, zoos are not going to go away. It is easier to try to change large institutions that are adept at fund-raising than it is to abolish them. At any rate we are responsible for the lives of a great many animals, and more are being bred all the time. Given that zoos exist, there is a great difference between good ones and bad ones. I would like to close by expressing some of my hopes and fears about how zoos may develop in the future.

As I have already said, the best zoos in the future will be increasingly indistinguishable from small parks. The conditions under which animals will be kept for breeding purposes and scientific study will be naturalistic. While the idea of a *naturalistic* environment should not be confused with a *natural* environment, it is clear that human-designed naturalistic environments rule out some of the worst of the abuses to which captive animals traditionally have been subject. For example, naturalistic environments would not permit animals to be constantly observed by hundreds of small boys who feed them Cracker Jacks and hurl various objects at them. This obviously would be an improvement over many exhibits that exist today.

In my opinion there will be increasing tension between what zoos do to gain public support (entertain) and what they must do in order to justify themselves (preserve species). This tension will emerge within zoos as those who are interested in animals and science will increasingly come into conflict with those whose charge is budgets and public relations. This conflict already prevents zoos from being as good as they can be, and it will become more pronounced in the future. This is a fear.

One hope that I have for the future is that we will recognize that if we keep animals in captivity, then what we owe them is everything. Whatever else we may believe about the morality of zoos, I hope we can come to a consensus

that these animals are in our custody through no wish or fault of their own. They are refugees from a holocaust that humans have unleashed against nature. There should be no question of culling these animals or trading off their interests against those of humans. If we are to keep animals in captivity, then we must conform to the highest standards of treatment and respect. My hope is that zoo professionals will accept this principle and that an enlightened and aggressive public will keep them to it, for the animals themselves have no voice in human affairs, and as nature recedes their voices become ever more silent.