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## Animal Liberation is not an Environmental Ethic: A Response to Dale Jamieson

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Dale Jamieson's characteristically clear and forceful 1998 paper 'Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic' is a response to a series of arguments by Baird Callicott and others to the conclusion that there is a profound difference between an ethic of animal liberation (AL) and an environmental ethic (EE). Callicott et al. also argue against AL itself, but Jamieson does not concern himself with these arguments, considering they have already been definitively refuted (fn. 11).

Jamieson's first point (p. 42) is that the claim that there is a major conceptual difference between EE and AL is *prima facie* surprising, since advocates of both hold similar views about what we should do (e.g., we should not dump poison into the sea, and we, as a society, should cut down on beef consumption – pp. 42, 46), and their views have similar histories. There is, however, an important difference between premises of arguments and underlying commitments on the one hand, and conclusions on the other. Kantians and utilitarians clearly hold very different philosophical views, yet their views about what we should do are in practice often largely indistinguishable. And, viewed from a fairly distant perspective, their histories are similar: they are both, for example, post-feudal, secular, Enlightenment, liberal doctrines. So, to take another point from Jamieson's paper (p. 46), though it is certainly true that proponents of AL will think the environment important, since animals need a decent environment, their reasons for so valuing the environment may well turn out to be different from the reasons given by proponents of EE. More on this below.

Jamieson concludes his history of the debate between AL and EE with the suggestion that by the early 1980s three claims were seen as characteristic of EE:

- 1) Non-sentient entities have value (Non-sentientism).
- 2) Collective entities such as ecosystems have value (Collectivism).
- 3) Value is mind-independent: even if there were no conscious beings, aspects of nature would be valuable (Mind-independence).<sup>1</sup>

Jamieson is quite right, in making the distinction between what he calls the source of values and their content (p. 47), to suggest that the inclusion of Mind-independence within EE was a mistake. Mind-independence is a metaethical

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thesis, which, as far as I can see, could logically speaking be accepted or denied by a proponent of any mixture of Sentientism or Non-sentientism, on the one hand, with Individualism or Collectivism, on the other. And it does seem that many environmental philosophers have now largely come to see this. The heart of EE is Non-sentientism and Collectivism. Whether one should accept Mind-independence is a separate issue, one I shall return to at the end of this paper.

The biggest rabbit Jamieson attempts to pull out of his hat is the claim that Non-sentientism and Collectivism need not be beyond the reach of AL (pp. 47 ff.). This claim rests on the making of some important distinctions, so let me now discuss these. The first distinction is that between source and content, and I have already agreed with that. The second is between what Jamieson calls 'primary value' and 'derivative value'. There are two components to Jamieson's elucidation of this distinction. The first is a universalisability argument. If I claim moral significance for myself on the ground that I possess property *p*, then I must accept the claim that any being possessing property *p* has the same moral significance. This argument, however, contrary to Jamieson's implication, does not ground a distinction between sentience-related and non-sentience-related properties. I may claim moral significance for myself as a functioning living organism, for example, and this would require me to attribute that significance also to trees. (This means also that the objectivity/sensitivity distinction Jamieson uses on p. 52 will not do the work he wants it to do.)

Jamieson then goes on to claim that: 'Non-sentient entities are not of primary value because they do not have a perspective from which their lives go better or worse. Ultimately the value of non-sentient entities rests on how they fit into the lives of sentient beings' (p. 47). My first difficulty here is to see how this differs from a baldish denial of Non-sentientism. The proponent of EE will want to claim primary value for non-sentient entities.

Another difficulty I have with the primary/derivative distinction brings us to Jamieson's third distinction, that between intrinsic and non-intrinsic (i.e. instrumental) valuing. Again, I am prepared to accept this distinction, though I do think that talk of instrumental value muddies the waters a little: 'instrumental values' are not in fact values at all, but merely non-valuable means to things which are valuable. Anyway, my second problem with the primary/derivative distinction concerns the nature of derivative value. The value of non-sentient entities is derivative because it rests on how they fit into the lives of sentient beings. But this seems to make them merely instrumentally valuable. This understanding of derivative value as instrumental value seems to make sense also of Jamieson's other examples. According to Jamieson, Churchill may well have been right to move the pictures, and the destruction of Dubrovnik may be a great crime. But this all makes sense on Sentientist assumptions, according to which pictures and beautiful old cities are instrumentally valuable because of their role in promoting aesthetic experience.

This, of course, leads into a serious problem with Jamieson's use of the intrinsic/non-intrinsic distinction, since he suggests that the way proponents of AL can attach themselves to EE is by intrinsically valuing derivative goods. But this sounds like a strange and inconsistent kind of fetishism: valuing as ends mere means. In other words, I believe that there is still a profound philosophical difference between AL and EE as characterised in terms of their respective denial of and acceptance of Non-sentientism and Collectivism.

One further worry about the primary/derivative distinction. According to Jamieson, Robin – who thinks trees are of primary value – and Ted – who denies that humans or gorillas are of primary value – are not making a 'logical or grammatical error'. But why not? If primary value is value that arises only for those beings with a perspective on their own lives, and we assume, surely plausibly, that Robin and Ted both agree that trees have no such perspective and humans and gorillas do, then it is unclear why they are not demonstrating a misunderstanding of the concept of primary value.

Finally, Mind-independence. As both Jamieson and I agree, this an issue tangential to the AL/EE debate. But it is nevertheless important. Jamieson accepts Mind-dependence, the thesis that there is no value without valuers. Now this to me sounds very close to the claim that value arises from valuing, and this in turn to the idea that:

$x$  has value =  $x$  is valued.

If so, then there is no need to talk of anything's 'having value', since all that is taking place is valuing. If that is so, then Mind-dependence undermines not only both AL and EE as characterised above, but any theory which attributes value to anything. I disagree, then, with Jamieson's claim that '[c]onstructivism is a story about how our practices come to be, not about how real, rigid or compelling they are' (p. 51). According to constructivism, our practices are real enough; but I fail to see why we should continue to find them compelling if nothing is of value.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Jamieson makes it clear later – see e.g. p. 45 – that he sees the Mind-dependence thesis as equivalent to the claim that there is no value without valuers. In fact they are not equivalent, since a hedonist might claim that there could be no value without conscious beings, but that there would be value in a world containing no valuers but only beings experiencing very basic sensual pleasures.

#### REFERENCE

Jamieson, Dale 1998. 'Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic', *Environmental Values* 7: 41-57.