BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Animal-Rights Primitivism: A Vital-Needs Argument Against Modern Technology

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I argue that those who embrace animal rights should also embrace primitivism—the view that humans should abandon modern technology and take up something like hunter-gatherer technology instead. I call my view "animal-rights primitivism" to distinguish it from human-centered arguments for primitivism. In particular, I employ a vital-needs framework to make my argument. I argue that hunter-gatherer technology is the least harmful kind of technology, it is sufficient to meet human vital needs, and it is possible for humans to make the transition to hunter-gatherer technology while still meeting their vital needs. Alternatively, I argue that even if humans cannot make the transition while still meeting their vital needs, they are responsible for putting themselves in that situation and therefore forfeit the right to aggress against the vital needs of other sentient species to do so.

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I. Introduction

This essay is about the implications of animal rights for modern technology. I take for granted that many, if not most, humans living in wealthy industrial societies ought to abstain from eating sentient non-human animals, using them for scientific research, using them to make furniture or clothing, or using them for other human purposes, because doing so violates their rights. My aim here is to persuade those who already accept these conclusions that they should also support primitivism—the abandonment of modern technology and the return to the use of something like hunter-gatherer technology—because of the actual harm modern technology already imposes on sentient non-domesticated non-human animals and the potential harm modern technology may impose on these animals in the future. At a minimum, these actual and potential harms violate the rights that these animals have to life, liberty, and to be free from unfairly imposed risk. They may also violate other rights, such as the right to property or habitat (Donaldson and Kymlicka: 40, 160, 198). I call the position I develop in this essay "animal-rights primitivism" to distinguish it from primitivisms motivated by other concerns, the main alternative being arguments for primitivism based on human interests or rights.

I wrote this essay because the animal ethics literature seems to have neglected this topic despite its importance. The work of animal rights/liberation philosophers like Peter Singer, Tom Regan (375), Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (291), among others, all hint at, or mention, the tension between modern technology and animal rights/liberation, but move on very quickly without giving satisfying answers as to why they side with modern technology.

James Robert Schultz

That's not to say that no one has written on this topic. The connection between animal liberation/rights and primitivism has been made by various activists (Taylor and Shipley, Nocella 2016), writers, and academics, but the arguments have not been developed as well as one would hope. Within academia, the most similar argument to my own appears to be that made by Mara J. Pfeffer and political scientist Sean Parson (2015).

Within academic philosophy, the work of Steven Best comes closest to the views articulated in this essay. Best is an ardent supporter of animal rights, edited an anthology on "revolutionary environmentalism" which includes a section titled "Primitivism and The Critique of Civilization," and discusses "civilization" critically throughout his work (2006, 2014). While some of the excerpts in his book on revolutionary environmentalism explicitly argue for primitivism, these are written by activists, and do not engage with academic philosophy. It appears that Best supports primitivism, but does not explicitly argue for it.

Other professional philosophers, while not particularly concerned with the plight of non-human animals, have done helpful work on modern technology, civilization, and the fate of humanity. David Skribina argues in favor of abandoning modern technology primarily because of its negative effects on humans (2016). Nick Bostrom, Toby Ord, and other philosophers associated with the Future of Humanity Institute, while not opposed to modern technology, have done helpful work on the catastrophic risks posed by modern technology. Karl Widerquist and Grant S. McCall argue that because some humans are made worse off by the state/civilization as it currently exists than they would be in a small-scale stateless society, like humans lived for most of their existence, governments owe these

humans things like an unconditional basic income if the state/ civilization is to be maintained (2107: 244).

Various thinkers outside of the academy, associated with anarcho-primitivism, green-anarchism, eco-anarchism, and anti-civilizational anarchism, like Derrick Jensen, and John Zerzan, however, appear to have written some of the most direct attacks on modern technology and various academics have commented on their ideas (Smith 2007, 2002; el-Ojeili; Moen; Skribina; Parson 2009, 2007). But in terms of the argument from animal rights to primitivism, their work is deficient in several ways. Although Zerzan and Jensen show significant concern for the plight of non-human animals they do not engage with the animal ethics literature or recent political philosophy and would favor abandoning modern technology even if animals were of no concern at all, because of their belief that modern technology is an overall loss for humans as well.

This neglect in the animal ethics literature and lack of cross-pollination between the animal ethics literature and the anti-technology/civilization literature is unfortunate, because if the arguments are right, we ought to change the way we live in fundamental ways. But even if the arguments turn out to be misguided and are ultimately rejected, the question of whether modern technology should be abandoned is implicit in animal rights philosophy and ought to be answered one way or the other. This essay is an attempt to begin filling that void.

In Section II, I introduce the vital needs framework. In Section III, I apply the vital needs framework to the question of sentient non-humans and technology: I argue that hunter-gatherer technology is the least harmful technology, discuss how the transition to hunter-gatherer technology could be made,

discuss what I call bad consequences objections, and put forward two replies to these objections. In Section IV, I conclude by noting some issues not covered by this essay and the likelihood that the views argued for in this essay will ever be implemented.

II. The Vital Needs Framework

a. Four Central Premises

In this section, I shall first highlight some of the central premises for the ethical framework upon which my argument for animal-rights primitivism depends. After stating these central premises, I will further define my terms, provide context, and briefly defend these premises. Here are four central premises in my argument:

1. Interference Principle: A member of one species may aggress against the vital needs of members of another sentient species to meet the vital needs of members of the aggressing species, unless the aggressing species is responsible for bringing about the situation in which they must aggress against the vital needs of members of the other species (Sterba 2000:189, Taylor, Cahoone, Wiggins: 33).

2. Least Harm Principle: When aggressing against the vital needs of members of another species to satisfy vital needs, the aggressor must do so in a way that minimizes harm to the victims of the aggression (Sterba 2000: 197).

3. One species may not aggress against the vital needs of another species to satisfy non-vital needs or luxury interests (Sterba 2000: 189).

4. Vital needs are based in biology rather than culture and from a human time scale are practically static.

b. Vital Needs Generally

One of the key concepts here is vital needs. Some philosophers have discussed essentially the same concept using the phrase "basic needs." For simplicity, I shall refer to "vital needs" only, even when referring to work that uses the word "basic" instead. By vital needs, I mean roughly the needs which an individual, or members of a species typically have, that must be met in order to live a decent life (Sterba 2000:189). Philosophers have proposed a variety of candidates for the needs that should be counted as vital including food, water, exercise, rest, recreation, companionship, sexual activity, social acceptance and recognition, freedom from harassment, freedom from continual fear, education, and employment (Brock and Miller: §3, §6). For many individuals having all of the items on the vital needs list will be sufficient for living a decent life, though having these things does not guarantee a decent life. Illness or accident might still cut one's life short or seriously jeopardize its quality.

c. Static Biologically Based View of Vital Needs

For the purposes of my argument, I shall rely on an understanding of vital needs based in human biology, similar to that of David Wiggins. Under Wiggins's account a need is vital "if it results from a law of nature, an unalterable and invariable environmental fact, or a fact about human constitution" (Brock

JAMES ROBERT SCHULTZ

and Miller: §3). This view might be contrasted to the view of someone like Soran Reader who "is notable for her claim that there is nothing normatively special about needs that are rooted in common human nature" (Brock and Miller: §3).

The vital needs of humans are relatively static because vital needs are based in human biology. Human biology changes over time, but that change is slow. The vital needs of humans today are essentially the same as the vital needs of humans a thousand, or ten thousand, years ago. But the means by which many humans satisfy their vital needs, or "satisfiers" (Brock and Miller: §2.3), today are, of course, very different from the means employed by humans in the distant past (Sterba 2000: 189). For example, many humans living today satisfy their vital need of having food by going to the grocery store. In the past most humans would have satisfied that need by hunting or gathering.

d. Interference Principle and Responsibility Proviso

While I borrow the phrase "interference principle" from Angus Taylor, James Sterba and David Wiggins have also defended similar principles (Wiggins: 33) ("limitation principle"), and the principle used here has some minor differences from those. By "aggression," I include actual and potential future harm.

The interference principle, as stated here, is justified on at least two grounds. First, prohibiting humans from aggressing against the vital needs of other sentient species to satisfy vital human needs would likely require the extinction of humanity. I assume that humanity has a right to exist. Second, allowing humans to aggress against the vital needs of sentient non-humans to satisfy non-vital human interests would improperly disregard the interests of other species. The idea behind the interfer-

ence principle is that important, or vital needs, should not be sacrificed for trivial, or less important interests.

My version of the interference principle includes a responsibility proviso, that is, at least not explicitly, included in Taylor's and Sterba's versions. That proviso says "unless that member is responsible for bringing about the situation in which they must aggress against the vital needs of the other species." The idea behind the proviso is that we should not allow someone to profit from their own wrong doing. As Sterba says, we "have a strong obligation to prevent lifeboat cases from arising in the first place." (Sterba 2000: 196).

e. Least Harm Principle

The least harm principle says that when one means of satisfying a vital need is less harmful to other sentient species than another means of satisfying the same vital need and it is possible to adopt or move towards the less harmful means of satisfying the vital need while still satisfying one's own vital needs in the process there is an obligation to adopt or move towards the less harmful means of satisfying the vital need (Sterba 2000: 196-197).

While the least harm principle might be seen as independent of the interference principle, it can also be viewed as a corollary of the interference principle. The interference principle says "humans may aggress against the vital needs of sentient non-human animals when necessary to satisfy vital human needs." If two means are capable of satisfying a vital need, but one means is more harmful than the other means, then the additional harm associated with the more harmful means can be viewed as "unnecessary." Unnecessary harm violates the interference principle.

Ja mes Robert Schultz

This least harm principle might be applied in two distinct kinds of situations. To illustrate, consider the first kind of situation. Suppose that under conditions X humans may satisfy their vital needs with either technologies T1 or T2 and that T2 is less harmful to other species than T1. In that situation humans must adopt T2 right away. Now consider the second kind of situation. Suppose that under conditions Y humans require technologies T1 to satisfy their vital needs. Under conditions Y humans cannot satisfy their vital needs using technologies T2. But under conditions Z humans can satisfy their vital needs using technologies T2. Technologies T2 are less harmful to other sentient species than T1. If it is possible to adopt or begin transitioning from T1 to T2 while still meeting the vital needs of humans then these humans have an obligation to do so.

III. Applying the Vital Needs Framework to the Question of Animals and Technology

Having considered the relevant principles, I shall now consider how they apply to the question of the relationship between technology and sentient non-humans. Because I assume all human societies must aggress against the vital needs of sentient non-humans to meet vital human needs and that few are likely to challenge that assumption, I shall skip directly to my argument that hunter-gatherer technology is the least harmful kind of technology.

a. Hunter-Gather Technology Is the Least Harmful Technology.

There are at least three reasons for thinking that hunter-gatherer technology is the least harmful kind of technology.

First, philosophers such as Lawrence Cahoone have argued that hunting is less harmful to other sentient species than engaging in agriculture. Cahoone compares the harms associated with hunting with a gun, local organic-sustainable farming, and "industrially or non-locally farmed vegetable nutrition." (Cahoone: 80). He concludes that hunting is less harmful than eating industrial or non-locally farmed vegetables, but takes no firm stand on local organic-sustainable farming compared to hunting. Cahoone, however, does not consider hunting with a handcrafted weapon like a hunter-gatherer would. Hunting with a handcrafted spear or a bow would be far less harmful than hunting with a gun since it would not involve metal mining or the pollutants emitted from the manufacturing process, so if Cahoone's argument is right it seems likely that hunting with a handcrafted weapon is probably less harmful than any kind of farming.

Accepting this argument, gets us a long way towards the conclusion that hunter-gatherer technology is the least harmful kind of technology, but not all the way. The harm to sentient non-humans from hunter-gathering is the harm from hunting plus the harm from all other activities, like gathering food and materials to build shelter. Similarly, the harm from societies that depend on agriculture is the harm from agriculture plus the harm from all other activities. It may be that the "all other activities" of hunter-gatherers are more harmful than the "all other activities" of agriculturally based societies and that this negates the benefits to non-humans associated with hunting. Additionally, hunter-gatherer societies and societies dependent on agriculture do not exhaust all of the possibilities. For example, we might also consider pastoral or horticultural societies.

JAMES ROBERT SCHULTZ

Second, modern technology has allowed for a larger human population and for greater consumption per person—all of which mean more harm to other species. Scientists have estimated that the human population before the Agricultural Revolution was between 4 and 10 million (UN, Ord:352) while today there are some 7.7 billion humans living on the planet. As things stand now, twelve percent of the earth's land mass, excluding Antarctica, is used for cultivating crops (IPBES: 28); the U.S. has more than four million miles of road (American Road); and worldwide there are 50,000 large dams. Humans increased the number of dams rapidly over the last fifty years (IPBES: 30); more than doubled urban areas since 1992; cut down 180 million hectares of forest between 1990 and 2015; doubled the weight of resource extraction between 1992 and 2019; and increased per capita consumption of materials by fifteen percent since 1980 (IPBES: 28).

A direct result of this human expansion is an enormous loss of animal life and habitat. "A full 75% of the terrestrial environment, 40% of the marine environment, and 50% of streams manifest severe impacts of degradation"(IPBES: 6); at least 680 vertebrate species have been driven to extinction by humans since 1500; more than forty percent of amphibian species and more than one third of marine mammals are threatened; and buildings, vehicles, and plant agriculture, each individually kill billions of animals per year (Fraser and MacRae; Donaldson and Kymlicka: 201, 284; Fisher and Lamey; Benatar 2013: 224).

Third, modern technology threatens both humanity and non-domesticated animals with the risks associated with artificial intelligence, nuclear war, climate change, other environmental damage, nanotechnology, and high energy physics experiments (Ord; Benatar 2013: 194). While technological optimists

and pessimists vary in the estimate of the existential risk from technology, they both seem to agree that the risk is substantial. Toby Ord, whom I would classify as an optimist, argues there is about a seventeen percent chance that a human induced existential catastrophe will occur in the next one hundred years and a fifty percent chance "that humanity" doesn't "avoid[ ] every existential catastrophe and [ ] fulfill [ ] its potential." (Ord: 167). John Leslie estimated a thirty percent risk of an existential catastrophe over the next five centuries. Nick Bostrom estimates the total long-run existential risk is twenty-five percent or higher. Martin Rees estimated a fifty percent "chance of a global collapse [ ] of civilization within the twenty-first century."(Ord: 380). Thinkers like Jensen seem to think that anthropogenic existential catastrophe is inevitable some time soon unless humans give up modern technology (Jensen: ix-x). No such threat exists from hunter-gatherer technology.

b. Possibility of Redistributing Harms and Benefits of Modern Technology Instead of Abandoning it.

One might think that instead of abandoning modern technology, humans could work on reducing the harm that it generates and use it to actively benefit sentient non-humans. If this were done sufficiently well, modern technology would no longer lead to unjustified aggression against the vital needs of non-human animals.

There are numerous ways humans might reduce the harm generated by modern technology. A few example include reducing the human population (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2, 192; Benatar 224; Best 165), replacing fossil fuels with less harmful energy sources like solar, wind, and nuclear, replacing meat from live animals with meat alternatives or in vitro meats

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(Owen and Savulescu), replacing drugs traditionally extracted from animals with synthetic drugs (Romero), and "locating and designing structures in light of animal habitats and migratory patterns, constructing animal underpasses under roads, creating wildlife corridors, and fitting vehicles with wildlife warning devices." (Donaldson and Kyklicka 201).

Examples of using modern technology to actively benefit non-human animals include treating wild animals with veterinary medicine, using drones to stop poachers, activists using drones to expose the activities of the animal agriculture industry (McCausland, Pyke, and O'Sullivan), and using GPS technology to better understand and assist wildlife populations. In the future, humans might bring non-humans within the scope of the welfare state (Pearce) or benefit a significant number of animals by preventing catastrophic natural disasters like a large asteroid or comet impact (Ord: 167).

Despite these and many other ways modern technology might be made less harmful to or used to benefit sentient non-humans, I remain unconvinced that such measures would satisfy the principles set out in section II or any other acceptable view of animal rights.

Suppose, for example, that humans did everything they could to minimize the harm they caused through modern technology short of abandoning it. This scenario raises at least two problems. First, a modern technological society is likely to cause more harm to sentient non-humans per human than a hunter-gatherer society for the reasons given in III (a). Second, maintaining modern technology may require a greater population than doing away with it, because modern technology requires a significantly higher degree of specialization than

hunter-gatherer technology. The principles set out in section II suggest that the maximum permissible human population is that population needed to avoid an undue risk of human extinction. Estimates of the minimum viable population for humans "range from hundreds of people up to tens of thousands." (Ord 41). But it seems likely that the population needed for the maintenance of modern technology would be greater than the population needed to avoid an undue risk of human extinction.

There are still problems with this idea even from a more utilitarian perspective. It might be argued that despite these actual or potential benefits of modern technology to sentient non-humans, that the scale still tips against modern technology, because the harms associated with modern technology are so large. While humans may be able to prevent a catastrophic natural disaster like a large asteroid or comet impact, even Ord, who views modern technology quite favorably, estimates that anthropogenic risks are 1,000 times greater than natural risks (Ord: 168).

c. Making the Transition

The transition to primitivism might be done suddenly or gradually. Either way, the transition will require significantly reducing the human population. In accomplishing this goal, modern technology will likely be of great assistance, but once the population has reached a satisfactory size, modern technology should be abandoned.

There are currently something like 7.7 billion humans on the planet. For simplicity, suppose half of that population is male, half is female, and that all will eventually mate. If each couple only has one child, and all of the children survive (also a simplified assumption), the population will be cut in half in one

generation. If the population of the first generation is 7.7 billion, the second generation will be 3.85 billion, the third 1.925 billion, the fourth just under a billion, and the fifth less than half a billion. If some couples choose to have no children, the population would decline even faster.

Global population is already expected to decline. Some countries, like Germany and Italy, already have below-replacement total fertility rates and many other countries are expected to follow. But governments also have a variety of other options for reducing population. Governments could help provide better access to contraceptives and sex education, put a cap on the number of children one may have, but allow for tradable rights (Skibina: 278), or provide financial incentives for not having children (Kates: 65,67). Policies like these could have a significant effect given that 45% of pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended (Sawhill and Gyot). Currently, there are something like 1.7 births per woman in the United States. If we could eliminate all unintended pregnancies, we could lower births per woman to 0.9. If these more liberal measures fail, governments could employ more coercive measures.

d. Bad Consequences Objections

One common class of objections to primitivism shares the premise that primitivism will have bad or even catastrophic consequences for humans (Flood:11; Hall: 382). This premise has two components. The first component consists of the assertion that the transition to primitivism will have bad or catastrophic consequences. The second component consists of the assertion that humans will be significantly worse off in a primitive society than in modern industrial society. Obviously, these objections, if true would likely be fatal for any primitiv-

ism motivated by human interests or rights, but for a primitivism motivated by animal rights, as is under consideration here, this class of objections is only fatal if it can also be shown that the interests or rights of sentient non-humans do not somehow counteract the negative consequences experienced by humans.

Consider the assertion that the transition to primitivism will have bad or catastrophic consequences first. A transition to primitivism could be either sudden or gradual. At a minimum, a sudden transition would probably be catastrophic for both humans and sentient non-humans in the short term. A significant number of humans might die from starvation, disease, and violence. Non-domesticated animals might be wiped out by significantly increased human predation in the absence of other food sources (Gowdy 7) and in the absence of careful planning many harmful pollutants would probably be let loose into the environment.

Given these considerations, it is my view that the transition ought probably be gradual. As described in III(c), the first priority of a gradual transition to primitivism would be significantly reducing the human population. Significantly reducing the human population in a gradual way raises at least two practical concerns related to population aging and unfairly burdening marginalized groups during the transition.

Population aging may be problematic for a variety of reasons. For example, if spending on public programs for the elderly is held constant while the elderly population continues to grow, society must dedicate an increasing amount of resources to support the elderly. Eventually, we may face a choice between reducing support for the elderly or reducing support for

other projects (Benatar 2006: 183). Reducing support for the elderly is likely to affect their quality and length of life.

Policies for reducing the human population may also lead to unfair burdens on marginalized groups like people of color, people with disabilities, indigenous people, or people who identify as LGBTQ. This could happen if subjective or easily manipulable criteria are used to determine who gets to reproduce and raise children, if financial incentives are used in a way that puts more pressure on the poor to abstain from reproducing than it does on the rich, or if accommodations for child rearing aren't made for people who are incapable of having children through sexual reproduction (McLeod and Botterell 2019; McLeod 2022).

Now consider the assertion that humans will be significantly worse off in a primitive society than in modern industrial society. The conventional view of modern technology is that it has provided a great net benefit to humanity both in terms of length and quality of life. Life expectancy at birth for people living in wealthy countries like the U.S. is around 80 years old (Murphy et. al) compared to 30 to 37 for modern-day foragers, 30 for ancient Romans, and 26 for hunter-gatherers in 1150 A.D. (Ruggeri; Diamond; Ord: 18, 294). Apart from length, there is also a strong case that quality of life is vastly improved by technologies like plumbing, anesthesia, analgesics, refrigeration, electricity, cars, airplanes, phones, television, the internet, and air conditioning. Humans living in a primitivist society would be deprived of these benefits.

If the deprivations are serious enough they might amount to vital needs deprivations. If they are unavoidable vital needs deprivations then humans may be free to continue aggressing

against the vital needs of sentient non-humans in order to retain modern technology.

e. No Vital Needs Deprivation Reply

There are at least three ways to address these objections: we can deny their factual component or suggest how these concerns might be avoided with the right policies, we can deny their view of vital needs and how they apply even if we agree about the facts, or we can argue that the responsibility proviso kicks in and that it doesn't matter if humans are deprived of their vital needs because of their responsibility in bringing about the situation. Here I shall focus on the first two.

Consider possible factual or policy responses to the concern about population aging first. We might respond that population aging isn't all that it's made out to be. Some think, for example, that population aging is "less worrisome than popularly supposed," because what really matters is total dependency levels and increased spending on the elderly can be offset by decreased spending on the youth dependents (Onselen and Errington 2004: 9; Bloom, Canning, and Lubet 2015: 86). Or we might grant the reality of the problem but propose solutions like encouraging people to work longer (Onselen and Errington 2004: 10) or simply increasing the amount of resources we spend on the elderly.

I think we can avoid most, if not all, of the problems related to unfairly burdening marginalized populations if we properly design our policies. Unlike the kind of parental licensing scheme imagined by Hugh Lafollete meant to prevent harm to children, a universal one-child policy, "employs [an] objective measure[ ]" (McLeod and Botterell 2019: 13) that is not easily manipulated. Unfair financial pressures on the poor can

James Robert Schultz

be eliminated by avoiding the use of financial incentives altogether or tailoring them so that the size of the reward or penalty is sensitive to wealth in the same way as progressive taxation. Finally, people who are unable to have their own children can adopt the children of those who exceed the one-child limit.

In stating the objection above, the shortened lifespan of some people from losing access to medical technologies seems like one of the stronger candidates for a scenario in which someone would be deprived of their vital needs. But in my view there can be no such thing as a vital need for any specific medical technology. Specific medical technologies are means of meeting needs not vital needs themselves. More specifically, having access to specific medical technologies seems to be based on a need like social acceptance and recognition. In a society where antibiotics are widely available it is wrong to deny someone access to antibiotics when they are in need of them because to do so fails to properly recognize them. But in a society that does not have antibiotics, no wrong can be done by denying them to someone.

These replies are by no means intended to be total refutations of the kind of objections I've stated above. But the objections are also not fully fleshed out. Here, I merely mean to sketch possible objections and replies. To fully state the objections or replies would require far more space than I have here.

f. Responsibility Reply

Suppose, we believe that humans can't make the transition to primitivism while still meeting their vital needs. The vital needs argument for animal-rights primitivism does not end there. If humans are responsible for bringing about the situation in which they cannot meet their vital needs without ag-

gressing against the vital needs of other sentient species then they are still obligated to make the transition to primitivism. I shall now make the argument that humans are responsible for bringing about this situation.

Let me begin with an argument for denying responsibility and work backwards. An objector may argue that all, or most, humans are not responsible for creating the situation in which they must aggress against the vital needs of other species to meet their own vital needs, because nobody chooses the society into which they are born. Modern technology and the harm that it causes existed before any now-living human was born.

In response to the objector, one can argue that for some humans, adult humans with normal cognitive functioning, the objector's argument clearly does not work. While it is true that no one chooses the society into which he or she is born, if moral responsibility is a meaningful concept, we must nonetheless take responsibility, when we come of age, for ending the harm that modern technology does to non-human animals. If we do not take this responsibility upon ourselves and do what we can to end that harm we cannot claim the benefits of the interference principle.

The objector might reply that this is not enough to establish responsibility. We live in a society in which the use of non-human animals is generally seen as unproblematic. Many people, while being moral agents, may never seriously consider the possibility that harming non-human animals is morally problematic or that using modern technology causes serious harm to non-human animals. If this is simply because they've never been exposed to the idea, it seems hard to blame them for this shortcoming. If this is so, then even a significant number

of moral agents may not be responsible for bringing about the situation in which humans must aggress against the vital needs of other species.

This limitation, however, is not as significant as it first appears. My argument assumes that at some point there would be some kind of democratic deliberation where the issues in this essay would be debated in highly visible public forums. This would be followed by voting. Under this scenario the number of moral agents who could claim they weren't aware of the issues drops significantly. Anyone paying the least bit of attention to public affairs would be aware of what was going on.

Whatever the circumstances, there will always be some humans, like infants and humans with severe cognitive disabilities, who cannot be blamed for their dependence on technologies that require aggressing against the vital needs of other sentient species, because they neither commit the aggression themselves nor comprehend how the satisfaction of their vital needs depends upon that aggression. More able humans may claim that it is permissible to aggress against the vital needs of other sentient species to protect the vital needs of these more dependent humans.

But those claiming to act on behalf of these more dependent humans are the ones who brought them into existence and they have an obligation to minimize the number of such humans they bring into existence. This follows from the responsibility proviso and the least harm principle. Limiting the number of children one has is easier than limiting the number of humans with severe cognitive disabilities, but prenatal screening is increasingly allowing for the later possibility as well.

IV. Conclusion

In this essay, I've argued that animal rights require the abandonment of modern technology. Both current and possible future harms caused by modern technology violate the rights of non-domesticated animals in vast numbers. Consequently, humans ought to reduce their population significantly and abandon modern technology. After making the case for animal-rights primitivism, I then address the objection that primitivism will be very bad for humans and that imposing that badness on humans would violate their rights.

This essay does not consider the relationship between animal rights/liberation, primitivism, and other ethical theories like utilitarianism or virtue ethics. A full consideration of the relationship between animals, humans, and technology would do that. I've chosen to focus on animal rights theory here, because I think rights approaches are the most likely to support primitivism, I sympathize more with rights approaches than these other theories, and it is not possible to address other theories in a short essay like this.

Finally, while I have argued for animal-rights primitivism, and find these arguments compelling myself, I think it is unlikely that the proposal I've made here of abandoning modern technology will ever be adopted. This may be because the arguments I've made don't actually work and someone more able than myself may be able to convincingly refute them. But even if the arguments do stand up to scrutiny, I still think it is unlikely my proposal will ever be adopted for the simple reason that people are good at ignoring injustices when examining them too closely leads to the conclusion that they have to give up things they value. This does not mean that making arguments like the one presented in this paper is a waste of time.

Many surprising things have come to pass in the course of human history. In a span of just one hundred and fifty five years the United States banned slavery, enfranchised African Americans and women, elected its first black president and placed a black woman on the Supreme Court. Most people living in 1865 would have thought it unlikely for these things to pass and yet they have. There is no way to know how our ideas or actions will shape the future. All we can do is speak and act on what we see as truth and hope for the best.

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James Robert Schultz

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