

Future Pasts

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Killing nature to save it?

Ethics, economics and rhino hunting in Namibia

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Bath Spa University, School of Oriental & African Studies, University of Edinburgh
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Future Pasts draws on Arts and Humanities research methodologies to document and analyse culturally-inflected perceptions and practices of sustainability. It has a particular geographical focus on west Namibia, where three of our core research team have long-term field research experience.

The project seeks to:

- enhance understanding of sociocultural, economic and environmental changes in historical and post-independence contexts;
- document and support cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge regarding present and historical cultural landscapes of west Namibia;
- extend analysis and understanding of the historical ecologies of the Namib;
- interrogate interpretations of 'sustainability', particularly those contributing to the promotion of a growth-oriented 'green economy';
- foster cross-cultural public discussion of concerns relating to environmental change and sustainability;
- critically engage with the power dimensions shaping whose pasts become transferred forwards to the future in contemporary approaches to environmental conservation and sustainability.

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Killing nature to save it? Ethics, economics and rhino hunting in Namibia

Mike Hannis¹

Abstract. This paper presents a case study of ethical discourse generated by the officially sanctioned trophy hunting by a US hunter of an endangered black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) in Namibia, following a permit auction raising US\$350,000 for rhino conservation in this context. Both the hunter and the Namibian government were vocally condemned by those focussing on the welfare of the animal. The emphasis here, however, is not on animal welfare concerns directly, but on the dominance of economic reasoning in the heated debate surrounding the story, and on how an apparently ‘wrong’ action is seen to become ‘right’ if it has economically desirable consequences. The welfare of the individual animal is one of several ethical considerations rendered invisible or illegitimate in this process: others may include local perspectives, historical context, contemporary power relations, and the pre-shaping of future management decisions. The calculative consequentialist logic of the market displaces other forms of ethical reasoning, marginalising critique and further consolidating its own hegemony. But this is not a triumph of utilitarianism: little trace remains of Bentham’s egalitarianism, or of J.S. Mill’s concerns with the qualities of pleasures, and their effect on character. It is rather a triumph of economics over ethics, in which almost anything can be commodified into commensurable ‘capital’, thereby erasing other ways of understanding and engaging with the world.

Key words. trophy hunting; Namibia; rhino; ethics; utilitarianism; economism

1. Introduction²

At the beginning of the twentieth century there were an estimated 100,000 black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) in sub-Saharan Africa (WWF³ n.d. a). This was a remnant of a larger population of perhaps 850,000 (Emslie 2012), which had already been drastically reduced by indiscriminate sport hunting by Europeans (for Namibia see narratives in Alexander 2006(1838) and Galton 1890(1850)). Today the five thousand or so animals that remain are classed as critically endangered (Emslie 2012), and as an Appendix 1 species under the United Nations Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES n.d., online). They are threatened by habitat loss and other factors, but primarily now by organised ‘poaching’ for rhino horn, which is prized as an ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine, for the hilts of traditional *janbiya* dagger handles in the Middle East, and increasingly for consumption as a

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² This paper was first presented to the 13th Annual conference of the International Society for Environmental Ethics, held at Pace University, New York, 29 June – 2 July 2016.

³ Acronyms used in the paper are listed alphabetically here: CBD – United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity; CITES – United Nations Convention on Trade in Endangered Species; IFAW – International Fund for Animal Welfare; IUCN – International Union for the Conservation of Nature; KZN – KwaZulu-Natal; MET – Ministry of Environment and Tourism (Namibia); NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation; WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature.

status symbol in Vietnam (Bradley Martin and Bradley Martin 1982; Ayling 2013; Hanks 2015). The plight of this highly charismatic species, summarised here by WWF, is well-known among environmentalists and animal lovers:

Even though they are largely solitary animals, they were once so plentiful that it was not unusual to encounter dozens in a single day. However, relentless hunting by European settlers saw their numbers quickly decline. By the end of the 1960s, they had disappeared or mostly disappeared from a number of countries, with an estimated 70,000 surviving on the continent. And then they were hit by a poaching epidemic, which started in the early 1970s – effectively eliminating most black rhinos outside conservation areas as well as severely reducing their numbers within national parks and reserves. About 96% of black rhinos were lost to large-scale poaching between 1970 and 1992. In 1993, only 2,475 black rhinos were recorded. But thanks to successful conservation and anti-poaching efforts, the total number of black rhinos has grown to around 5,000. (WWF n.d. b: online)



Black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*), Gemsbokvlakte, Etosha, Namibia.

Source: Hans Stieglitz / Wikimedia https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schwarzes_Nashorn-01.jpg, accessed 14 September 2016.

Charitable bodies raise significant funding for rhino conservation, much of which is now spent on increasingly militarised attempts to stop poachers shooting rhinos and removing their horns (Duffy et al. 2015; Büscher 2016; Büscher and Ramutsindela 2016)⁴. Many small donors who had contributed to such fundraising were no doubt among those surprised in late 2013 to read the story of Corey Knowlton, a well-heeled US citizen who was able to quite legally purchase the right to go to Namibia and do exactly this (see, for example, Allen 2013).

⁴ It should be noted, however, that the policing of African conservation areas where rhinos are present has long been significantly militarised with frequently violent outcomes, accelerating in the mid- to late-1980s in particular (Hanks 2015).

2. One man and his rhino

The Namibian government has auctioned small numbers of permits to shoot black rhinos every year since 2012 (Anon 2016). Bidding has recently closed on the 2016 quota of three animals (Haidula 2016). Proceeds are paid into a dedicated Game Products Trust Fund, charged with directing such monies back into relevant conservation activities.

This policy is set within a broader context of attempts by a low-income country to monetise its abundant wildlife or ‘game’ as an asset, primarily via tourism – including both ecotourism and sport hunting – but also through other routes such as the export of zoo animals and ‘exotic’ meats. Trophy hunting is also strongly defended on freestanding conservation grounds (Leader-Williams et al. 2005; Naidoo et al. 2016). The rationale, endorsed by CITES (see e.g. CITES 2010) albeit hotly contested elsewhere, is broadly as follows. Rhino conservation in Namibia is underfunded. Optimum management of wild rhino populations sometimes requires the culling of certain individuals, usually old bulls. Sport hunters, especially from the US, will pay very large sums of money to shoot rhinos (IFAW 2016). Therefore, it makes good economic and conservation sense for a small number of permits to shoot specific animals under close supervision to be sold each year, to raise funds for the broader rhino conservation programme.

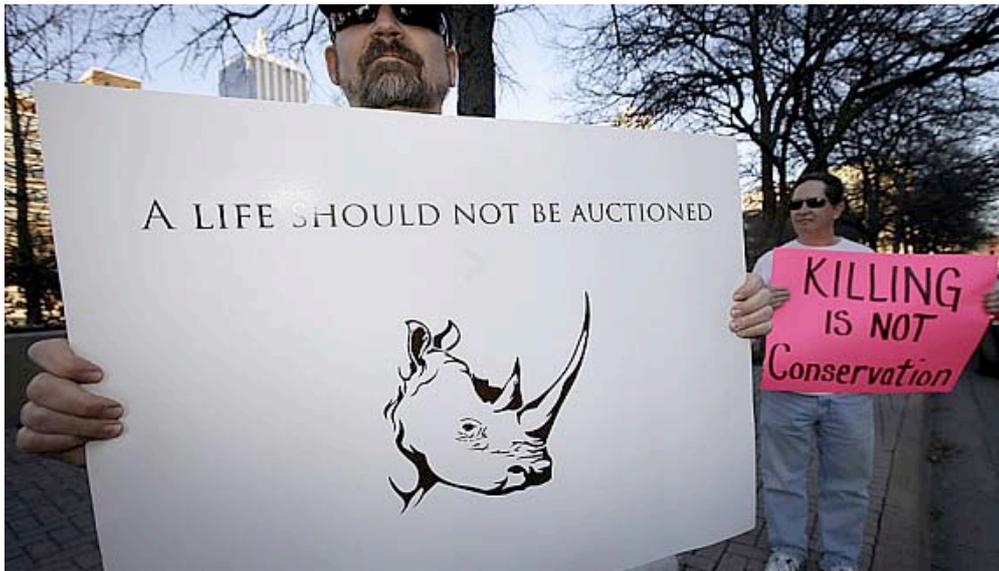
The 2014 permit auction gained much more international attention than previous ones, because it was held in Texas by the Dallas Safari Club, rather than directly by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in Windhoek, Namibia. This was an effort to maximise the price by going to where the money was – and it worked. Knowlton paid USD350,000 for his permit, substantially more than the previous high bid of USD223,000 (Goldman 2014).



Knowlton interviewed after the hunt, May 2015.

Source: online, unattributed.

The story attracted three rounds of high profile media coverage, first in January 2014 around the initial auction (e.g. Conniff 2014), then in March 2015 when Knowlton was granted a trophy import permit from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (e.g. Fears 2015), and then again in May 2015 when he finally shot the rhino (e.g. Morris and Lavandera 2015; Adler 2015). Each round was accompanied by outrage from animal welfare organisations, echoed and amplified across social media and directed not just against trophy hunters but also against the Namibian government. Knowlton received death threats. The hacking group Anonymous attacked *The Namibian* newspaper and other Namibian websites in protest (Immanuel and Shapwanale 2016).



Protestors outside the Dallas permit auction, 2014.

Source: Associated Press.



Composite image (artist unknown) illustrating online petition seeking to persuade the US Fish and Wildlife Service to deny Knowlton an import permit.

Source:

https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Director_Robert_G_Dreher_USFWS_Ban_Endangered_African_Animal_Trophy_Imports_From_Namibia/?pv=29, accessed 14 September 2016.

A spirited defence of the counterintuitive practice of funding rhino conservation by selling permits to shoot rhinos was offered by several environment and conservation NGOs, as well as (less unexpectedly) by the trophy hunting industry. It emerged that some large conservation NGOs (notably including WWF) were themselves deeply implicated in promoting and legitimising such activity (see, for example, Huisman 2015). Some, including the Chair of the IUCN's African Rhino Survival Group, argued robustly that sport hunting of endangered species was entirely compatible with conservation objectives (Knight 2013), but the rhetoric from one key specialist rhino conservation NGO was more typical:

Why, people ask, is a conservation organization like MET or Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife even allowing trophy hunts in the first place? Couldn't they get \$750,000 without having to suffer an animal being shot? Well yes, it would be nice if donors gave enough money to cover the spiralling costs of protecting rhinos from poachers. Or if enough photographic tourists visited parks and reserves to cover all the costs of community outreach and education programmes. But that just doesn't happen. It costs around \$500,000 a year to run a relatively small rhino programme with only 20-30 animals. Heaven only knows how much it costs to run Kruger National Park in South Africa, or Etosha National Park in Namibia. Fundraising for rhinos is hard. We're not just competing for funds against other endangered species – elephants, tigers, polar bears, pandas – but against cancer charities, children's charities, or the most recent natural disaster. In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore asserted that 97% of charitable giving goes to people-related causes and 1.5% to pet charities, leaving only 1.5% for the conservation of our entire planet. Are enough new rhino-focused donors really going to come out of the woodwork to make income from trophy hunting unnecessary? (Save the Rhino International 2014: online)

Influential commentators also accepted the idea, but again rather queasily:

Protecting wildlife is a complicated, expensive and morally imperfect enterprise, often facing insuperable odds. The risk with trophy hunting is twofold: commodifying an endangered species creates a gray zone in which bad behaviors can seem acceptable, and the public relations disaster this time could hurt Namibia's entire conservation effort. But so far nothing else matches trophy hunting for paying the bills. (Conniff 2014: online)

I don't understand the desire to kill a magnificent animal for sport, even if the individual is an older non-breeding male. The sale of the right to kill an animal for a trophy surely reflects the value that animal lives hold in at least some corners of our society: that killing an animal for fun isn't wrong, as long as you can afford it. It is right to worry about the sort of message that sends. But if an endangered species as charismatic as the black rhinoceros is under such extreme threat from poaching, then perhaps the message that the species needs saving has a larger problem to address than the relatively limited loss of animals to wealthy hunters. The real tragedy here is that the one rhino that will be killed as a result of Saturday's auction has received a disproportionate amount of media attention compared to the hundreds of rhinos lost to poaching each year, which remain largely invisible. (Goldman 2014: online)

This queasiness is echoed, albeit from a rather different perspective, in the conclusion of one of the few academic papers on the issue:

Whatever we may think of trophy hunting – and I share the distaste of serious sports hunters for it⁵ – at present it is a necessary part of wildlife conservation in Southern Africa (Gunn 2001: 89).

⁵ i.e. those not focused on the acquisition of trophies.

Are these ethical arguments? If so, what kind of ethical reasoning is involved, and where does it lead? It may look like a clear example of utilitarianism, given the (explicit or implicit) consequentialist claim that despite being apparently problematic, a policy of allowing trophy hunting is ethically acceptable, since calculation of the likely overall consequences reveals that adopting it will produce better outcomes than not doing so. This paper will argue however that rather than illustrating the predominance of one ethical approach (utilitarianism) over other traditions, it in fact exemplifies an assumption that economics trumps ethics in conservation policy.

3. Killing nature to save it

The paper's title derives from Kathleen McAfee's landmark critique of market-based conservation, which she provocatively termed 'selling nature to save it'. McAfee was deliberately echoing the infamous quote 'it became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it', attributed to a US officer following the bombing of Bến Tre in Vietnam (Arnett 1968). Discussing the 'production of "global" environmental discourse', McAfee notes that:

The dominant voice in this discourse is a post-neoliberal version of environmental economics, applied on a world scale. It recasts the popular environmentalist account of the spoiling of Eden by industrialism run amok into a parable of policy failures correctable by market solutions. The key to those market solutions, the story goes, is the privatization and commoditization of nearly every aspect of nature, from molecules to mountainscapes, from human tissues to the earth's atmosphere. This global environmental-economic paradigm reduces organisms and ecosystems to their allegedly fungible components, and assigns monetary prices, calculated with reference to actual or hypothetical markets, to those components. The result is a pan-planetary metric for valuing and prioritizing natural resources and managing their international exchange. (McAfee 1999: 133-134)

A key result of this international exchange, she argues, is to 'reinforce the claims of global elites to the greatest share of the earth's biomass' (McAfee 1999: 133). McAfee's primary empirical focus was on the treatment of bioprospecting in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), but her influential analysis and framing have been built on by subsequent critics of the broader phenomenon that has been called the 'financialisation of nature', and more specifically the 'financialisation of conservation' (see, for example, Sullivan 2012, 2013; Büscher 2013; Büscher et al. 2014). In many of the practices and markets targeted by such critiques, the exchange of money for 'nature' is opaque and indirect, focusing on abstracted units such as offset credits. In the sport hunting of endangered animals, however, the bodies of individual live animals are literally bought and sold for large sums of money, making this an example of what Duffy (2000) calls 'killing for conservation'.

The wealthy purchaser buys at auction the right not only to kill the animal but usually also to retain chosen parts of the body, known as trophies. The \$350,000 fee paid by Knowlton was coincidentally (or not), very similar to the 'black market' price of the rhino horn which he legally imported back to the US. There is currently no 'white market' for the international

trade of rhino horn. The only way a rhino horn can be legally exported from Namibia is as a hunting trophy. As with elephant ivory, there are persistent claims that a legal trade could lower prices and thereby disincentivise poaching. Key promoters of this idea are South African ranchers raising white rhinos on privately owned land, and seeking to make this activity profitable by selling the horns (see e.g. Christy 2016). Hanks (2015: 241) argues that without this option landowners will increasingly have little incentive to pay the costs of keeping rhinos on private land.

The seller of a rhino trophy hunting permit, meanwhile, gains funds which may then become available to advance conservation objectives. Often, as in this case, conservation activity funded in this way is specifically targeted at other individuals and populations of the same species as the trophy animal. As noted above, the culling of selected individual animals is itself claimed to contribute to effective conservation management of rhino populations. Knowlton's rhino was allegedly an old post-reproductive bull whose aggressive behaviour was impeding the breeding efforts of younger males (Knight 2013).

It is important to note that many aspects of this narrative are disputed on empirical as well as ethical grounds. These include whether male rhinos ever really become definitively 'post-reproductive'; whether management without culling might also be a viable strategy; how a market imperative to provide trophy-bearing animals for hunting might affect conservation management, and the relationship between such management and the 'poaching' problem (see e.g. IFAW 2016: 7); exactly what conservation measures the Game Products Trust Fund prioritises; the balance of benefits from trophy hunting accruing to local communities as opposed to international tour operators; and the compatibility and relative economic possibilities of ecotourism and trophy-hunting (see for example Mathiesen 2015; Cota-Larson 2015). No claims are made in this paper about any of these empirical issues, or about the specific conservation outcomes of the Knowlton case.

Assertions of conservationist credentials by sport hunting long predate Knowlton's adventure, and indeed McAfee's analysis. They even predate keen hunter and former US president Theodore Roosevelt's much-quoted claim that:

In a civilized and cultivated country wild animals only continue to exist at all when preserved by sportsmen ... The excellent people who protest against all hunting, and consider sportsmen as enemies of wild life, are ignorant of the fact that in reality the genuine sportsman is by all odds the most important factor in keeping the larger and more valuable wild creatures from total extermination. (Roosevelt 1990(1893): 272)

Indeed, the global history of 'big game hunting' is intimately connected with the history of reserves and parks, areas historically – and often still – managed to maximise the availability of animals or 'game' conserved in order to be killed for sport and entertainment (Mackenzie 1987). Today this is a very big industry. A recent study finds that '1.7 million hunting trophies have been traded between nations between 2004 and 2014' (IFAW 2016). But this kind of hunting has for centuries been an élite leisure pursuit for the rich and powerful (for fuller discussion see Mackenzie 1987; Descola 2013: 51-53; Sullivan 2015; Hanks 2015: 21),

and this kind of conservation has for an equally long time routinely involved the appropriation and enclosure of land previously held and managed in common, and the exclusion of local and/or indigenous people. This has certainly been the case in Namibia (see, for example, Dieckman's (2007) historical analysis of Hai||om evictions from Namibia's Etosha National Park).

Claims that 'big game hunting' serves conservation objectives are now also tightly integrated with very modern economic claims about the power of the market to achieve conservation objectives. This is particularly true when the animals hunted are themselves members of protected and endangered species.

4. Ethics, economics and utilitarianism

This then is a context in which complex issues of environmental ethics abound. It is time to further narrow the field. This is not a paper about the ethics of hunting in general, about differences between subsistence hunting and sport hunting, or even about the trophy hunting of non-endangered species. Nor does it discuss broader biocentric or sentiocentric arguments about human treatment of animals.⁶ It is not about 'wildness', or enclosure, or displacement for conservation. Moreover as already noted it does not offer any detailed empirical analysis of the economics of conservation in Namibia. All of these are important topics with lively literatures, some of which are considered elsewhere in the broader *Future Pasts* research project of which this paper is a part (see Sullivan et al. 2016). The focus here is simply on the marked prevalence of calculative economic reasoning in discussions of endangered species trophy hunting that purport to be considering ethical issues, as exemplified in the Knowlton case.

Trophy hunting for conservation has certainly been accused of heartless utilitarianism:

Richard Conniff makes a very persuasive case for auctioning the rights to shoot an endangered black rhino in the interest of conservation. Accepting his facts at face value, if a rich person wants to spend \$350,000 to kill one animal, and that money will go to protect the rest of the species, where's the problem? In my view, the problem (well, one problem) is this: these are the cold utilitarian ethics of the emergency room, the battlefield, the hostage situation. ... To save someone, you allow someone else to die, or maybe you even shoot someone – acts that would be unconscionable in everyday life. But it is for everyday life that we need a conservation ethic, one that is democratic, humane, and sustainable. Dependent on killing that is otherwise pointless, and on extreme

⁶ A biocentrist regards any *living* entity as being of value, and thus being worthy of moral consideration, regardless of species. For a sentiocentrist, the criterion is not mere life but *sentience*, usually construed as a property possessed by many (but not all) living non-human entities. For an ecocentrist, the relevant quality is simply that of being *part of the ecosphere* – a broader category usually taken to include not just living but also abiotic entities such as mountains, rivers and (for some) even whole ecosystems. All three positions have many variations and ultimately all derive from human perceptions of these qualities, and thus of value, in other-than-human entities. But all are taken to oppose the alleged 'human chauvinism' of anthropocentrism – the view that *only human beings* (and by extension, things valued by humans) can be meaningfully said to have value.

inequities of wealth and power, trophy hunting for conservation is none of these.
(Rutberg 2015: online)

Rutberg's argument here is compelling. But the kind of market reasoning he decries cannot in fact claim the fig leaf of applying a recognised ethical tradition. This is certainly not utilitarianism as its celebrated early proponents Jeremy Bentham (1780) or J.S. Mill (1863) would have recognised it. Rather than the ethics of Bentham or Mill the reasoning at play here is more akin to the optimistic economics of Adam Smith (1759, 1776), in which money released into the market by the self-interested consumption of the rich is thought to trickle down and benefit others.

By the standards of his day, Bentham was a strong egalitarian. He wanted *everyone's* 'pleasures and pains' to be entered into the 'hedonic calculus', the comprehensive summing up of pleasurable or painful (hence 'hedonic') consequences which was to determine the desirability (or otherwise) of any proposed course of action. He saw utilitarianism as an emancipatory project that would make society fairer, by better accounting for the hitherto ignored interests of disadvantaged groups, notably women and the working classes. Indeed he famously aspired to an ethical system in which the suffering of animals would also count.

A properly conducted Benthamite utilitarian analysis of trophy hunting as a conservation strategy would thus need to consider many additional features of the situation, including vexed (though not insoluble) factual questions such as those around how much of the claimed economic benefits of trophy hunting accrue to local communities rather than to foreign-owned hunting tourism operators (for one sceptical view on this, see Campbell 2013). More challenging however would be *counterfactual* questions about the precise conservation outcomes, such as whether culling *this* male at *this* moment would really lead to more flourishing lives for other members of the relevant rhino population than not doing so. Other practical questions concern how management regimes might change in the absence of trophy hunting, and how this might affect the interests of both local people and wildlife (see, for example, Naidoo et al. 2016).

Beyond these considerations lie even trickier questions such as how to balance the supposed interests of a population against those of an individual, or indeed how to account for the so-called 'existence value' of a particular rhino for particular humans. The impossibility of ever actually doing the maths properly is a standard objection to utilitarianism, and rightly so. But it is particularly strong in contexts characterised by significant incommensurability, as this one is (for theoretical discussion, see Hannis 2015; for another context in which such problems occur, namely biodiversity offsetting policy in England, see Sullivan and Hannis 2015).

It should be noted here that commentators concerned specifically with animal welfare also sometimes purport to use utilitarian reasoning, rhetorically weighing the animal's suffering against the hunter's pleasure. Typically these arguments focus on the individual animal, and

question or disregard alleged conservation benefits of hunting. Such perspectives are often coupled with calls for ‘ecological justice’ (see e.g. Kopnina 2016), arguing that unacceptable ways of treating humans – including shooting them for fun – should also be seen as unacceptable when done to animals. Such arguments seem clearly based on biocentric or perhaps sentiocentric commitments, although proponents often confusingly self-describe as ecocentrists (see footnote 4 above). For some, this leads by a rather wonky logic to the unhelpful conclusion that it would be desirable to shoot the hunters. This is complex territory, however, and at least one self-declared vegan commentator vocally *supports* trophy hunting on the basis of clearly utilitarian reasoning, arguing essentially that the suffering of one old animal is outweighed by better life chances for the rest of the rhino population and benefits for local people (Rust 2015: see also Varner 1998).⁷

A more Millian utilitarian would no doubt be interested in the *qualities* of the various pleasures and pains involved, and the effects of trophy hunting on both individual and societies (Mill 1863: see also 1859). Would the satisfaction supposedly gained from shooting a rhino be a ‘higher’ or a ‘lower pleasure’? What would the effect of doing so be on the *character* of the hunter – and indeed of others? This reflection suggests a range of alternative perspectives, some of which might draw on virtue ethics, the field of ethical reasoning that seeks to focus on the character and motivation of the agent, rather than on the act (as Kant did) or the consequences (as utilitarians do). To adjust Thomas Hill’s celebrated question: *what kind of person* shoots a rhino for fun (Hill 2005: see also Hannis 2015)?

At this point, it is important to note Knowlton’s repeated insistence that shooting a rhino for fun was not what he was doing at all. In multiple media interviews he repeatedly stressed the link between his payment and the alleged conservation outcomes, eliding the actual act of shooting/killing, and positioning himself as just someone willing to ‘step up and do what had to be done’:

“This wasn’t my plan, but the plan of the Namibia Environment and Tourism [Ministry],” [Knowlton] said. “They understand I wasn’t this evil guy who was hell-bent on killing something.” (Fears 2015: online)

“Nobody in this situation, with this particular black rhino put more value on it than I did,” said hunter Corey Knowlton this week, before killing the rhino with several shots he had paid \$350,000 to fire. “I’m absolutely hell bent on protecting this animal.” (Mathiesen 2015: online)

“I don’t know if the black rhino ever got more awareness than it got over this situation, and with that hopefully it gives it a better chance of surviving in the future,” Knowlton said. “Maybe 100 years from now – maybe it’s delusions of grandeur – but I hope people

⁷ There are of course a wide range of influential and challenging positions on this issue, going well beyond utilitarianism. For instance Martha Nussbaum’s concern to safeguard core capabilities of non-human animals leads her to call for a ban on all sport hunting – but oddly she also wants humans to work to minimise predation between animals (Nussbaum 2007).

will look at it and say this was the turning point that got people to understand what it means to be a conservationist.” (Morris and Lavandera 2015: online⁸)

Clearly there is some denial involved here, and Knowlton’s candid admission to delusions of grandeur seems accurate. If he did not want to pull the trigger he could easily have got someone else to do the deed – perhaps one of the local team who guided him to the right spot and made sure he shot the right animal. The expertise needed to make sense of his comments may well be psychological rather than ethical. But one thing does stand out: he was at pains to downplay any idea that he goes out killing animals because he enjoys it. To some extent it seems clear that even this self-publicising trophy hunter felt there to be *something wrong with enjoying the act of killing*.

This is arguably the nub of the issue. For many of those who perceive it this ‘wrongness’ is not something that can be captured in a utilitarian calculus, because it cannot be quantified. It is just not that kind of thing: there is no way it can appear in a balance sheet, and hence no way it can be outweighed. This is why the argument that trophy hunting for conservation is ethically acceptable cannot properly be described as a utilitarian argument in which pleasure is seen to outweigh pain. This is arguably an example of a standard objection to utilitarianism, on the basis of incommensurability: but it is a particularly stark example. What is supposedly being outweighed is not ‘an amount of pain’ but the weight of an acknowledged obligation to act ethically. What is outweighing this is not ‘an amount of pleasure’ but the weight of the countervailing assumption that economics is the fundamental yardstick by which all human activity should be judged. The result seems to be that economics outweighs ethics. This is not a consequentialist utilitarian argument, but an ideological one. It is a defence of the hegemony of economism.

5. Analogies: the importance of motivation

Trophy hunting for rhino conservation in Namibia may perhaps seem to present an exotic and unusual set of choices – perhaps this contributes to exotic and unusual reasoning. What then of other comparable situations?

Consider a veterinarian about to euthanise a terminally sick cat. The distraught owners are in the waiting room, having tearfully said their last goodbyes and handed over their beloved pet. A third party offers to pay handsomely to be allowed to give the lethal injection, under full supervision. Should the veterinarian accept the offer? Most probably would not – but suppose they were tempted, perhaps because the practice was struggling financially and the fee offered would allow an increased number of other pets (and owners) to be helped. If the veterinarian were indeed so tempted, they would surely move quickly on to asking the third party about

⁸ See also online video linked from Morrison and Lavandera 2015, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/07/us/texas-namibia-black-rhino-hunt/index.html>. For further in-depth audio interviews with Knowlton, see Adler 2015 at <http://www.radiolab.org/story/rhino-hunter/>, last accessed August 2016.

motivation. They would want to know *why the money was being offered*, as well as how much. What if the newcomer turns out to have a lifelong obsession with killing cats for his own sadistic gratification, and to have been doing this surreptitiously since childhood? It seems clear that the appropriate decision would be different in this case from one in which the would-be cat-killer was (for instance) a temporarily unemployed veterinarian wanting to keep her hand in. How about a zoo animal? Recent controversy over the euthanasia of a giraffe at Copenhagen zoo would surely have been even more intense if someone had paid to shoot it (Eriksen 2014). Is the situation any different in an abattoir? Should it be?

This is not only about animals, however. Suppose someone wanted to pay to step in and perform a supervised amputation in an underfunded hospital, offering so much money that other patients would benefit from healthcare they would otherwise not have received. Again, in the unlikely situation that the offer was even considered, questions of motivation would swiftly arise. How about someone who wanted to pay to act as a prison warder, or to restrain patients in a mental health facility? In countries where corporal or capital punishment is practiced, even starker examples can be created.

These and many other possible examples display the same structure as the trophy hunting case. Some level of harm (from restraint up to and including death) is to be caused, in order to achieve some apparently greater good. Someone then offers to pay to be the one doing the harm, in a well-managed and fully supervised way, apparently achieving the same outcome as if the deed had been done by ‘professionals’, but with the added benefit that they will also donate funds to a relevant cause. On the face of it this seems to produce greater benefit, and hence be desirable. So far, so utilitarian.

But even if such situations could be satisfactorily analysed using a utilitarian hedonic calculus, an error is inevitably introduced if the effects of the money are counted as a benefit without also counting the effects of the agent’s motivation. How would the cat-owners, or indeed the relatives of the death-row prisoner, be affected by the knowledge that the killing had been done not dispassionately but with relish? How would the amputee react to hearing that the act of sawing their leg off had been a source of pleasure? How might broader social and political values be affected by permitting such transactions? Well-functioning societies do not generally encourage inflicting pain or death for pleasure. Even for a (hypothetical) determined anthropocentrist entirely immune to the suffering of animals, these are surely important considerations.

Someone who claimed that such considerations do not matter would not be reasoning as a consistent utilitarian – they would be disregarding significant consequential pleasures and pains. Arguably they would not be engaging in coherent ethical reasoning at all. Of course it would (hopefully) be hard to find such a person. Most people, if pressed hard enough, will admit that non-economic values exist. There is for instance a pretty broad consensus against selling children. Examples such as those considered briefly above suggest that there is also a

fairly broad consensus against the *enjoyment of inflicting harm*. Utilitarian justifications for inflicting harms are particularly vulnerable here: if the great ‘we’ decides that someone’s interests should be sacrificed, then ‘we’ lose at least some of our moral authority if ‘we’ delegate the task to someone who will enjoy it.

Even if there is no bodily harm being caused, it is often inappropriate to decide who gets to do something solely on the basis of who will pay the most. Stretching the analogy a little, consider the less lurid example of a hydroelectric dam being demolished after years of campaigning by environmentalists (see, for example, Nijhuis 2014). It seems plausible that the right to press a button setting off the demolition charges could be auctioned, but how might that appear to local people, or to those who had campaigned for the demolition?

The key message is that some things are not appropriately transacted on markets, and the ‘right to kill’ seems like a prime example of such a thing. This applies whether or not the individual being killed belongs to an endangered species, though perhaps even more so when it does. This is a matter of public as well as private morality. Notwithstanding the overtones of paternalism, from a virtue ethics perspective there is some truth in J.S. Mill’s observation that ‘the first question in respect to any political institutions is, how far they tend to foster in members of the community the various desirable qualities moral and intellectual’ (Mill 1861: II.2). The important question of who decides which qualities are desirable certainly complicates this insight, but it does not invalidate it. Institutions (political or otherwise) that facilitate the development and exercise of a virtuous character foster desirable moral and intellectual qualities, as well as protecting essential capabilities for flourishing. Institutions which facilitate vice do the opposite (see discussion in Hannis 2015).

6. Conclusion

There are good reasons why funding the conservation of endangered species through trophy hunting of individuals of these species is controversial and, for many, deeply counterintuitive. Economic evaluation and ethical evaluation of such policies may inform one another, but the two are fundamentally different assessments, requiring different evidence and different deliberations. Even for a utilitarian, economic analysis is only one input to the ambitious project of calculating the overall hedonic consequences of a given policy. Not all ‘pleasures and pains’ (whether human or animal) are reducible to the alleged common currency of money.

The specific narrow question of how exactly present policy in Namibia might affect relevant rhino populations can be answered, if at all, only with reference to numerous empirical issues not addressed here (for Namibia, recent analyses include Muntifering et al. 2015; Naidoo et al. 2016). More broadly however, McAfee’s concerns once again seem pertinent:

By promoting commoditization as the key both to conservation and to the ‘equitable sharing’ of the benefits of nature, the global environmental-economic paradigm enlists

environmentalism in the service of the worldwide expansion of capitalism. It helps to legitimate and speed the extension of market relations into diverse and complex eco-social systems, with material and cultural outcomes that do more to diminish than to conserve diversity and sustainability. (McAfee 1999: 135)

Markets are intrinsically amoral, as is clear to all but the diehard ideologue. This alone means that economics can never replace ethics. Rather, given the chance, it will *displace* them. Finding ethical ways through current crises in the relationships between humans and the rest of the world will depend not on getting better at commodifying and monetising the world, but on being clearer about what cannot and should never be monetised.

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NB. All weblinks were last accessed in August 2016.

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