

Comments on “The Easy Defense of the Feathered Apes (And the Hard Problems It Raises)”
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The main argument in the paper is that several “hard (moral) problems” arise once we acknowledge that many species of corvidae have moral status. The first part of the paper aims to show that these species have moral status on the basis of their capacities, including their ability to experience emotions, self-awareness, self-control, sophisticated cognition (knowledge of fluid dynamics), and appropriate response to others (as a byproduct of forming relationships). The second part of the paper discusses two cases, the first concerning living space and the second invasive corvids, to illustrate what sorts of “hard (moral) problems” that arise once we acknowledge their moral status. The first case is based on the fact that (unlike dolphins or apes) corvids are cohabiters of cities. Since their behavior is considered a nuisance, solving the problem may require killing them. But if corvids have the same moral status as dolphins or apes, then if it is wrong to kill dolphins or apes, it is also wrong to kill corvids. The second case is based on the fact that some species of corvids are predatory. In some cases, the killing of predatory corvids is required in order to protect other species. The same problem would arise if killing a gorilla would save California least terns. The authors ask (but do not attempt to answer) the question: If we are not justified in killing a gorilla, are we justified in killing corvids?

I agree with the authors that given that many moral problems are generated from the mere fact that humans have taken over most of the available wilderness (which previously functioned as their habitat). I also agree with the authors that there are various reasons for thinking that corvids have moral status, although I am not entirely convinced by some of the reasons provided. For example, knowledge of fluid dynamics is attributed to corvids because they have learned to use stones but not buoyant materials. One can learn to solve a problem without having knowledge of why the solution works. Evolutionarily, it seems to be beneficial to be able to solve problems without necessarily understanding why the solution works. I know turning the key opens my door, but I have no idea why it works since I do not know how the lock system works.

However, leaving such issues aside, the paper does not attempt to discuss why these problems arise in the first place. It seems to me that our economic system, which makes the acquisition of capital the primary goal of human activity, gives rise to many of these problems. Perhaps, cohabitating the planet with other species requires replacing the current economic system with one that makes equality of condition not only for humans but also animals and the biosphere a priority. This may not solve all of the problems, but it would certainly limit them. Instead the paper seems to suggest that these problems are inevitably the result of the mere cohabitation with other species coupled with the acknowledgement

that these species have moral status. The criticism may seem unfair given that the authors are merely trying to point out that certain problems arise. However, discussing the conditions under which these problems arise seems important in determining whether these problems actually arise once we acknowledge that certain species have moral status or for some other reason. If these problems arise for some other reason (as I have suggested), then the argument seems unmotivated. For we can acknowledge that these species have moral status without having to agree that this is what gives rise to these hard moral problems.