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BRINGING US TOGETHER¹

John W. Grandy²

First, I thank you for the opportunity to speak before this joint meeting of the Pennsylvania Academy of Science and the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Wildlife Society. It is a pleasure to address a group with whom my professional training is so compatible. I also appreciate the opportunity to discuss a topic of far more than professional interest: bringing the scientific, management, and animal protection communities closer together.

In recent years, much has been made of the differences between animal protection/welfare/rights and conservation. In simplistic terms, the difference is said to be between a view of wild animals as individuals and as populations. Some conservationists claim to see it as a waste to devote time and energy to ensuring the survival and health of individual animals. Conversely, others seem to take the view that the health and welfare of the individual animal is of highest importance.

But like many other discussions based on philosophical differences between largely compatible philosophies, the differences are far more apparent than real—and differences are often meaningless or fleeting, particularly at the day-to-day, real world level. First, many issues arise which should be of common interest to all of our professions, and upon which philosophical differences simply have no bearing. Furthermore, philosophical views, no matter how strongly held, are hardly static. Those held by individuals, like the aggregate views of society at large, change. They pulsate; they move: sometimes slightly, sometimes perceptibly; they swing like a pendulum or they trek over long periods in a reasonably predictable direction. For example, my views on a variety of animal welfare, animal rights, and ecological/conservation issues have changed over the years. I have no doubt that many of you have experienced changes in your attitudes as well. These changes mark us as vital, healthy people, that can accept change outside and inside ourselves.

I like to refer to this process of philosophical and sociological change as a kind of evolution. My observation is that much of the debate over the differences between the emerging animal welfare/rights/protection philosophy and the traditional conservation philosophy really reflects varying speeds of evolution of thought amongst largely sympatric people or groups. (Think, perhaps, in a conservation sense, of Leopold's evolution of thought [Leopold 1949]).

But let's go back to the most basic points of apparent divergence that I identified earlier. Animal protectionists are people who care for individual animals, their humane treatment, their welfare—their rights to basic protection from preventable suffering and cruelty. Conservationists care about ecosystems, ecological processes, and the survival and vitality of populations. But are these really distinct, and separable, on a day-to-day basis?

I doubt it.

First, does anyone know true conservationists or ecologists who favor inhumane treatment or cruelty to animals? Not likely! By the same token, does anyone know animal protectionists who do not care about the vitality of wildlife populations or the health of ecosystems. Of course not! Vital wildlife populations are made up of healthy viable individual animals.

And the conservation, animal protection, and scientific communities share very important mutual goals:

- Habitat preservation
- Viable, diverse populations of wildlife non-game/game
- Endangered and threatened species protection
- Maintenance of natural habitats
- Wetland protection/wilderness protection
- Humane treatment of animals
- Maintenance of species diversity on managed habitats
- Preventing avoidable suffering
- Pollution control
- Promoting urban wildlife

But with their commonality of goals and objectives, why all the fuss, why do people write books and scientific papers which pick apart philosophical differences and raise subtle distinctions—hardly visible to the general public—to new levels of divisiveness?

First, there are writings espousing new ideas concerning human responsibilities to provide for the stewardship and well-being of individual animals, populations, and ecosystems. These writings and concurrent discussions are a form of thoughtful, nonacrimonious debate among peers and peer groups (see e.g., Regan and Singer 1976; Elliot and Gare 1983; Attfield 1983; Regan 1984). This is a largely non-public debate. It is civil in tone and marked by mutual respect and admiration among participants. It is a kind of searching for new horizons, new directions, answers, and workable concepts. Not all participants agree—sometimes none agree—but that is the nature of the process. These discussions and writings provide the grist for change and necessary reconsideration as society, thought patterns, and individual values evolve.

Yet there is more to this debate than quiet respectful dialogue. The debate between animal protectionists, wildlife managers, and scientist/conservationists often seems to erupt in a violent public debate. Indeed, some participants focus on issues such as overpopulation and starvation, permanent habitat destruction, and other infrequent problems in an apparent attempt to elucidate differences, and belittle opposing philosophical views, rather

than create unity and consensus. This debate leaves the public confused (why should they fight?) and often results in divisiveness that frustrates accomplishment of our common goals. What happens in these areas? Why this public animosity and name-calling? Why do we see some of these issues elevated to such a level that they cause major schisms within the effort to achieve mutual goals?

Some of these arguments are from seemingly self-appointed ideologues who focus on extremes or the unusual (see e.g., Hutchins and Wemmer, this volume). Their writings seem intent on creating intellectual division by emphasizing extremes. Sometimes I think they are only interested in “publishing.” Their writings seem to have a chip on their shoulders. They seem to be saying: “We need to cooperate and work together—so long as you agree to see everything my way.” While these writers are divisive and would do better to participate in nonacrimonious quiet discussion, rather than public debate, even their papers are relatively few and far between, and contribute only slightly to visible public separateness.

Indeed, there is far more to this debate than misguided egos satisfying the publish or perish doctrine.

Let me cite a couple of examples of major controversies.

For years, we have had an ongoing predator control program in the western United States. It annually consumes millions of dollars and has killed everything from wolves to bald eagles, from black-footed ferrets to coyotes. Its supposed aim is to protect livestock. In reality, however, its major accomplishment is to kill wildlife. Predators are the target, but anything else that gets in the way is acceptable. The truth about the predator control program is that it is a not very good, simplistic political solution to a complex problem. Yet, time and again, science and wildlife management are put forth as both the philosophical underpinning and the intricate rationale for the predator control program. This is ridiculous, as anyone who has examined the program knows. And for the wildlife management and scientific community to allow themselves to be used as the rationale for the program only detracts from public confidence in the professional community. In a very real way, the wildlife and scientific communities are being used by the commercial livestock industry as justification for their own subsidy.

Next, look at the commercial trapping programs in operation throughout the United States. Why are these programs conducted? They are conducted because trappers sell animal pelts for money. Yet time and again trapping is defended as being part of an essential wildlife management or public health program: habitat protection, disease control, rabies control, starvation prevention, and animal health.

These assertions are, *at best*, well-intentioned nonsense from people either commercially motivated or motivated by an overwhelming desire to see the “tradition” of trapping continue. At the trapping industry level, these assertions are part of a carefully orchestrated campaign to preserve the commercial fur and trapping industry. Whatever the true reason, however, trappers should

argue their case on the basis of whatever its merits may be and leave wildlife and science out as a "justification." Scientists and wildlife managers, for their part, would be far better off to divorce themselves from this debate since wildlife managers and scientists have no professional stake in commercial trapping. As it stands, wildlife managers and scientists are allowing themselves to be used.

In short, as these examples illustrate, a primary reason for this visible divisiveness in our communities is that the professional and scientific communities are being used as pawns in a philosophical and political fight over exploitation of wildlife for commercial purposes. As scientists or wildlife managers there may occasionally be times when we are called upon to trap or control predators or other wildlife. But, clearly, modern day predator control and trapping are not programs conducted because wildlife managers and scientists have concluded that they are good and necessary.

My strong recommendation as a professional to professionals is for us to avoid being caught up in these largely economically motivated wars. As biologists and scientists ours is not to defend either commercial trapping, or the western livestock industry. We deserve more than to be implicitly or explicitly viewed as pawns. And what, you may ask, do we do when our professional responsibilities require that we do not deal with pure science, but must take positions on nonscientific philosophical issues. My advice is to do so in a way which preserves or enhances the ability to work together with our peers on other issues of mutual concern.

Humane ethics, animal protection, and animal rights are not incompatible with ecologically sound wildlife stewardship. They are an integral part of it, from treating wildlife for necessary research humanely, to habitat preservation and protection of endangered species. We should recognize and build on our similarities. We can start by agreeing to disagree on some basic philosophical issues when our views diverge, while recognizing the common need we all have to vigorously pursue and succeed in achieving our common goals.

Endnotes

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