67>

With the growing influence of environmentalism, many consider the conservation of endangered species a moral obligation that humankind must acknowledge and fulfill. Some even argue that society must strive to save every plant and animal species at any cost, while there is a conflicting view. Society should not, such a view insists, expend too many resources, which could otherwise be used to create wealth and jobs, trying to save endangered species. My stance is slightly more aligned with the former though my argument contains the specific prerequisite that society must save endangered species only if a species' extinction would lead to economic loss greater than the cost of saving that species.

Before elaborating on my reasoning, it is necessary to address a number of potential objections based on the nature of my view. I expect initial emotional responses to likely be negative from the public. Environmentalism, for example, would strongly condemn my position and argue that driving a species to extinction is a crime against nature, since every species is equal and humans are not entitled to slaughter other species. However, extinction is not new to nature. It has happened throughout Earth's long geologic history, long before modern humans occupied every continent except Antarctica. Geological discoveries inform us of five major extinction events in the last 400 million years; in this short geological period, more than three quarters of life on Earth was wiped out. Consequently, human beings are not morally bound to preserve the status quo of Earth's current biological diversity. We should not save every species without considering its socioeconomic consequences.

This does not necessarily mean we should never take action to preserve endangered species. If the resulting loss from a species' extinction exceeds the cost of saving it, we should definitely protect it. Consider the following three examples. We appreciate pandas so much that the loss of these species would be regarded as a heavy emotional loss. We support the protection of raptors, such as eagles and falcons, because their extinction would allow rodents to proliferate and result in significant crop losses. And some endangered species have genetic and research value, which could lead to cures for diseases like cancer. The definition of loss in these cases encompasses broader social consequences rather than being solely financial.

Another reason we should save a species is that it provides a relatively objective and measurable benchmark to assess our policy. What would happen if we spared no expense to save every endangered species? What if the resources expended saving them could be used to save refugees of wars and famine? It may be acceptable to deem humans and other species as equal but when they are in conflict should other species take priority over human life? Assuming responsibility for the protection of all species is dangerous and violates basic human principles, which are the foundation of modern civilization. Therefore, we must utilize reasonable methods when deciding whether or not to save a species from extinction.

The real challenge is how to evaluate the loss of a species. This is not a question that can be sufficiently addressed in this short response, but simple classification into four categories can elucidate how the value of a species is ascertained. The first is direct economic value associated with domesticated species. The second is economic value associated with the ecological function of a species, exemplified by raptors which prey on rodents. The third is a species’ research value. And the final category is cultural, religious, and aesthetic value, though this is admittedly more difficult to determine.

To summarize, I do not advocate allowing all endangered species to go extinct but believe it is unwise to strive to rescue every endangered species out of vague obligations. We should take action only when the loss of an endangered species outweigh the costs associated with saving it.