

Samantha Woods

Professor Lisa Sideris

ENV S 70

11, February 2025

### Balancing Ecosystem Integrity and Animal Rights

It is incredibly difficult to determine whether certain actions are right or wrong. This is particularly true of the Channel Islands Feral Pigs Eradication case. It is clear that the easiest solution to maintain the native fox and plant populations is to kill the feral pigs, but ease does not make a decision ethically right. This fact comes into sharper focus when we examine the value assigned to animals deemed less important than humans. Once we suspend our notions of human exceptionalism and reconsider our ethical rules, it is evident that the killing of these feral pigs is wrong.

In order to understand the error committed by killing the feral pigs of the Channel Islands, it is necessary to know the facts and failings of this case. According to the National Park Service, these non-native feral pigs posed a threat to the island's native and endangered fox species. The pigs' threat was magnified as they began to attract golden eagles which preyed upon the pigs and foxes. Further, endangered plant species and delicate archeological sites on the island were disrupted. Ultimately, the National Park Service decided to kill over five thousand pigs at the expense of possible advances in animal rights efforts. Now familiar with the details of this case, there is no further information or fact that would alter my stance. The facts surrounding the feral pigs' threat to the Channel Islands do not change the underlying ethical issue. The pigs were killed carelessly in large numbers, reinforcing the belief in human superiority. As a result, we lose the ability to "extend to other species the basic principle of equality that most of us

recognize should be extended to all members of our own species” (Singer, 169). The ability to treat other species with respect and equality is fundamental to the Animal Rights Movement. Thus, killing these pigs undermines animal rights by demonstrating our lack of obligation to other species.

While the killing of these pigs may cause us to regress in regards to animal rights, an opposing argument will find that there is more to be lost by allowing these pigs to run rampant. Considering that the pigs threaten the island’s native foxes, plants and archaeological sites, an opposing argument may employ a utilitarian ethic to assert that the greater good of the island outweighs the rights of the pigs to remain unharmed. Considering that, “environmental ethics prefers the integrity of ecosystems to the welfare of feral animals” (Rolston, 621), it is reasonable to argue that culling these feral pigs will not only benefit the fox population, but the entire ecosystem of Santa Cruz Island.

Culling the pigs may seem like an acceptable solution to protect the island's ecosystem, but this raises significant ethical concerns regarding the rights of animals. The moral wrongness of this culling is further emphasized when we consider that these pigs are “subjects of a life”. This point is emphasized by Holmes Rolston when asking veterinarians whether it is inhumane to value plant species above animal lives. Holmes states that, “Veterinarians especially may incline to say that animals count but plants do not. If asked why, the reply is likely to be that the goats can enjoy life and suffer when shot, but that the plants are insentient and do not feel anything at all”(Rolston, 621). Because animals have the ability to enjoy life and have interests, the pigs must ethically be considered. Further, it is wrong to kill these pigs because it is shown that their interests can be taken into account. This becomes clear when the “Judas” pig is introduced to the island. Authorities acknowledge these pigs’ ability to be subjects of a life by

utilizing their intelligence and sociability to lead hunters to the feral pigs. By using these animals' interests for their own ends, the Santa Cruz Island authorities prove that animals have a good of their own and that their interests must be recognized. This consideration must be extended to the feral pigs because they belong to the same species as the "Judas" pig, highlighting the cornerstone of environmental ethics that states "everyone's interests count, and no one's counts more or less than the equal interests of anyone else" (Regan 164). Therefore, the killing of the pigs violates the ethical principle that all living beings, regardless of their role or origin, deserve equal moral consideration.

Moreover, it is wrong to cull the feral pigs because they allow the Channel Islands to operate as a fierce ecosystem. These feral pigs provide sustenance for the island's golden eagle which prey on piglets as well as foxes. This is necessary to acknowledge because "An ecosystem's ability to support large predators is a mark of its ecological integrity" (Plumwood). In providing food for the island's larger predators, the feral pigs help to keep the food chain in balance. Further, the presence of the pigs protects the foxes from greater endangerment. By serving as prey for the golden eagles, the feral pigs reduce the predation pressure on foxes, as the eagles have greater access to the abundant pig population. The ability to protect the island's foxes against further predation allows the pigs to be protectors of the island rather than destroyers.

The ethical implications of culling the feral pigs of the Channel Islands reveal a moral dilemma, one that emphasizes the importance of recognizing the inherent value of all species, regardless of their origin. While the pigs may pose challenges to the ecosystem, their role in supporting larger predators, like the golden eagle, highlights their integral place within the island's ecosystem. Although culling the pigs may be the easiest solution, we cannot overlook

our moral obligation to consider these animals' interests and their right to exist. As Regan states, “You don't change unjust institutions by tidying them up” (Regan, 161), reminding us that ethical decisions require more than quick fixes. Ethics demands that we deeply examine our responsibilities toward all life forms.