

What we're talking about when we're talking about wildlife?

A philosophical distinction with a practical implication



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Wildlife raises public concern



- Need to talk with the public
- Public debates with stakeholders
- People express thoughts about wildlife

A large elk with impressive, multi-tined antlers stands in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The elk is facing right, and its body is a mix of brown and tan. The background is a blurred forest of green trees under a clear sky.

**“There are too many
elk in RMNP”**

**“There are
approximately 3000
elk in RMNP”**

“Elk are beautiful”

3 Statements, all about elk, but nevertheless about different phenomena

There are approximately 3000 elk in RMNP

- Elk as they exist “out-there”

There are too many elk in RMNP

- An ideal we should collectively strive for

Elk are beautiful

- A personal meaning assigned to elk

Goal: making explicit sense of the distinction

1. **Ontology**
2. **Epistemology**
3. **Consequences**

Conceptual sense provides intellectual tools for dealing with public debates

**Ontology is the philosophical study
of what there is**

**Many ontologists make a distinction
between:**

- 1. The physical realm**
- 2. The social realm**
- 3. The mental realm**

**Phenomena in those realms have
different characteristics**

Phenomena in the physical realm:

- Are constituted by matter
- Have material properties (e.g. size)
- Exist objectively (i.e. “out-there” independent of thoughts of people)
- There is exactly 1 physical realm

Phenomena in the social realm:

- Are constituted by social rules
- Are arbitrary, not completely arbitrary, taken seriously, necessary to coordinate behaviour, everywhere
- Can be explicit or implicit
- Exist intersubjectively (i.e. among a group of people)
- There are many social realms

Phenomena in the mental realm:

- Are constituted by mental dispositions
- Exist subjectively (i.e. depend on thoughts/feelings of individual)
- There are as many psychological realms as there are conscious minds

**Wildlife exists in 3 realms as 3
very different phenomena**

Material realm	wildlife
Social realm	
Mental realm	

**Material wildlife, social wildlife,
mental wildlife**

Epistemology is the study of knowledge

Question: when is statement valid?

- Statement about material wildlife is valid if true
- Statement about social wildlife is valid if just
- Statement about mental wildlife is valid if truthful

A potential misconception to be avoided:

Are psychologists not concerned with the truth?

A potential misconception to be avoided:

Are psychologists not concerned with the truth?

Yes they are.

BUT: not the truth about wildlife!

	Material wildlife	Social wildlife	Mental wildlife
Exists as ...	Things out there	Social rules for dealing with wildlife	An individual's thoughts/feelings about wildlife
Made of ...	Matter	Norms	States of mind
Wildlife as ...	Object	Organisation	Story
Mode of existence:	Objective	Intersubjective	Subjective
Validity claim:	Truth	Justness	Truthfulness
If valid, valid for:	Everybody	A social group	An individual

Consequences for wildlife managers involved in public debates

1. Identify the aboutness of a statement
2. Disagreement about material wildlife
→ joint fact finding
3. Disagreement about social wildlife
→ identify normative basis
4. Disagreement about mental wildlife
→ accept differences
5. Disagreement across realms is fake-disagreement

Suggestion for discours analysis

Distinction might be analytical tool?

Message for intergration of various scientific disciplines

Don't expect too much:

- 3 Realms are really different,
- Ontologically, and
- Epistemologically

Questions/discussion

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