
An Ethical Question of De-extinction of Extinct Species

In David Shultz's article "Should we bring extinct species back from the dead?" he explains how scientists now have the ability to potentially de-extinct animals such as the woolly mammoth and the passenger pigeon. This article describes the three main ways in which de-extinction may take place and why it is essential for scientists to employ these processes. This article assumes a tone of optimism and urgency while not offering much consideration to the possible negative consequences or moral objections associated with the implementation of de-extinction methods. In "The Ethics of De-Extinction" by Shlomo Cohen a more critical framework is offered to examine whether de-extinction is necessary in the case of each particular species. Cohen argues that we should critique the need for de-extinction based on five criteria: "the possible contribution of de-extinction to promoting ecological values, the deontological argument that we owe de-extinction to species we rendered extinct, the question of 'playing God' through de-extinction, the utilitarian perspective, and the role of aesthetic considerations in the ethics of de-extinction"(Cohen 1).

In respect to the field of biological science it is important to evaluate de-extinction based on testable criteria. If we disregard Cohen's weighty philosophical questions, two valid questions remain. What is the utility and what is the ecological impact? In David Shultz's article these questions are answered. The utility of de-extinction, from the human perspective, is scientific advancement. Currently, the three most promising methods to resurrect these animals are back breeding, cloning, and genetic engineering. This last method is being used in the mammoth and passenger pigeon groups. Scientists are using the CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats) method to extract specific traits from the extinct species and implant them into a modern surrogate (Shultz). For example the gene which makes mammoths hairy might be implanted into an Asian Elephant's DNA. If scientists are allowed to continue these practices on extinct creatures, someday they may be able to use it to improve human health. Maybe the genes which increase the likelihood of breast cancer could be altered. The possibilities are endless. The opportunity for scientific advancement meet Cohen's criteria by clearly demonstrating a utilitarian purpose for continued de-extinction efforts.

Cohen argues that for de-extinction to be ethical it must promote ecological values (Cohen 1). Shultz offers numerous positive ecological effects that de-extinction may have. After the woolly mammoth and passenger pigeon were removed from their ecosystems these environments were changed in negative ways. When the mammoths pooped and trampled across the tundra it helped spread seeds and maintain grasslands. Passenger pigeons had highly flammable droppings which caused forest fires, a healthy natural disturbance to the forests. The pigeons were also the primary method for white oaks to disperse their seeds (Shultz). Bringing back

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these two species would restore the arctic grasslands and replenish forests. It would be ecologically valuable. In conclusion, when comparing the information given in David Shultz's article with the criteria for ethical de-extinction offered by Shlomo Cohen, it is evident that the resurrection of woolly mammoth and passenger pigeon populations is an ethical pursuit.

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