

The Ethics of the Environment

Edited by
Robin Attfield



The International Library of Essays in Public and Professional Ethics

The Ethics of the Environment

The International Library of Essays in Public and Professional Ethics
Series Editor: Seumas Miller and Tom Campbell

Titles in the Series:

The Ethics of the Environment

Robin Attfield

Academic Ethics

Robin Barrow and Patrick Keeney

The Ethics of Teaching

Michael A. Boylan

Military Ethics

Anthony Coady and Igor Primoratz

Engineering Ethics

Michael Davis

Social Work Ethics

Eileen Gambrill

Development Ethics

Des Gasper and Asuncion Lera St Clair

Correctional Ethics

John Kleinig

Police Ethics

Seumas Miller

Bioethics

Justin Oakley

Research Ethics

Kenneth D. Pimple

Business Ethics and Strategy,

Volumes I and II

Alan E. Singer

Computer Ethics

John Weckert

The Ethics of the Environment

Edited by

Robin Attfield

Cardiff University, UK

First published 2008 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © Robin Attfield 2008. For copyright of individual articles please refer to the Acknowledgements.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Wherever possible, these reprints are made from a copy of the original printing, but these can themselves be of very variable quality. Whilst the publisher has made every effort to ensure the quality of the reprint, some variability may inevitably remain.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

The ethics of the environment. - (The international library of essays in public and professional ethics)

1. Environmental ethics 2. Environmental sciences - Philosophy

I. Attfield, Robin
179.1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The ethics of the environment / edited by Robin Attfield.
p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-2786-9

1. Environmental ethics. 2. Environmental sciences—Philosophy. I. Attfield, Robin.

GE42.R8453 2008

179'.1—dc22

ISBN 9780754627869 (hbk)

2007045516

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Series Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xv

PART I VALUES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

1 Richard Sylvan (Routley) (1973), 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?', in Michael E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott, George Sessions, Karen J. Warren and John Clark (eds) (1993), <i>Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology</i> , Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 12–21.	3
2 Holmes Rolston III (1975), 'Is There an Ecological Ethic?', <i>Ethics</i> , 85 , pp. 93–109.	13
3 Donald Scherer (1982), 'Anthropocentrism, Atomism, and Environmental Ethics', <i>Environmental Ethics</i> , 4 , pp. 115–23.	31
4 Robin Attfield (2001), 'Postmodernism, Value and Objectivity', <i>Environmental Values</i> , 10 , pp. 145–62.	41
5 Katie McShane (2007), 'Why Environmental Ethics Shouldn't Give Up on Intrinsic Value', <i>Environmental Ethics</i> , 29 , pp. 43–61.	59
6 Alan Holland (1996), <i>Nature – Every Last Drop of It – Is Good</i> , Thingmount Working Paper Series on the Philosophy of Conservation, Department of Philosophy, Lancaster University, pp. 1–17.	79

PART II THE LAND ETHIC AND DEEP ECOLOGY

7 Aldo Leopold (1949), 'The Land Ethic', in Michael E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott, George Sessions, Karen J. Warren and John Clark (eds) (1993), <i>Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology</i> , Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 95–109.	99
8 Arne Naess (1973), 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary', <i>Inquiry</i> , 16 , pp. 95–100.	115
9 J. Baird Callicott (1982), 'Hume's <i>Is/Ought</i> Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic', <i>Environmental Ethics</i> , 4 , pp. 163–74.	121
10 Y.S. Lo (2001), 'The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System (1980–2001): An Overview and Critique', <i>Inquiry</i> , 44 , pp. 331–58.	133
11 Darren Domsky (2006), 'The Inadequacy of Callicott's Ecological Communitarianism', <i>Environmental Ethics</i> , 28 , pp. 395–412.	161
12 Ramachandra Guha (1989), 'Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique', <i>Environmental Ethics</i> , 11 , pp. 71–83.	179

- 13 Val Plumwood (1991), 'Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism', *Hypatia*, **6**, pp. 3–27. 193
- 14 Mary Midgley (1992), 'Beasts Versus the Biosphere?', *Environmental Values*, **1**, pp. 113–21. 219

PART III BIOCENTRIC APPROACHES

- 15 Kenneth E. Goodpaster (1978), 'On Being Morally Considerable', *Journal of Philosophy*, **75**, pp. 308–25. 231
- 16 Paul W. Taylor (1981), 'The Ethics of Respect for Nature', *Environmental Ethics*, **3**, pp. 197–218. 249
- 17 Tom Regan (1981), 'The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic', *Environmental Ethics*, **3**, pp. 19–34. 271
- 18 Gary Varner (2002), 'Biocentric Individualism', in David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (eds), *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 108–20. 287
- 19 James P. Sterba (1998), 'A Biocentrist Strikes Back', *Environmental Ethics*, **20**, pp. 361–76. 301

PART IV VIRTUE ETHICS AND HUMAN VALUES

- 20 Thomas E. Hill Jr (1983), 'Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments', *Environmental Ethics*, **5**, pp. 211–24. 319
- 21 Bryan G. Norton (1984), 'Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism', *Environmental Ethics*, **6**, pp. 131–48. 333
- 22 Bernard Williams (1995), 'Must a Concern for the Environment be Centred on Human Beings?', in Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers, 1982–1993*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 233–40. 351
- 23 Dale Jamieson (2007), 'When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists', *Utilitas*, **19**, pp. 160–83. 359

PART V EQUITY AND THE FUTURE

- 24 R. and V. Routley (1978), 'Nuclear Energy and Obligations to the Future', *Inquiry*, **21**, pp. 133–79. 385
- 25 Ernest Partridge (1981), 'Why Care About the Future?', in Ernest Partridge (ed.), *Responsibilities to Future Generations, Environmental Ethics*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, pp. 203–20. 433
- 26 Henry Shue (1999), 'Global Environment and International Inequality', *International Affairs*, **75**, pp. 531–45. 451

- 27 Dale Jamieson (2005), 'Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice', in Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Richard B. Howarth (eds), *Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics, Ethics: Advances in the Economics of Environmental Resources*, **5**, pp. 217–48. 467
- 28 Kristian Skagen Ekeli (2005), 'Giving a Voice to Posterity – Deliberative Democracy and Representation of Future People', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, **18**, pp. 429–50. 499

PART VI PRESERVATION, DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

- 29 Holmes Rolston III (1996), 'Feeding People versus Saving Nature?', in William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette (eds), *World Hunger and Morality*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 248–67. 523
- 30 Alan Carter (2004), 'Saving Nature and Feeding People', *Environmental Ethics*, **26**, pp. 339–60. 543
- 31 Alan Carter (2000), 'Distributive Justice and Environmental Sustainability', *Heythrop Journal*, **41**, pp. 449–60. 565

PART VII MAKING A DIFFERENCE

- 32 Barnabas Dickson (2000), 'The Ethicist Conception of Environmental Problems', *Environmental Values*, **9**, pp. 127–52. 579
- 33 Robin Attfield (2003), 'Can Environmental Ethics make a Difference?', in Robin Attfield, *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 75–84 (plus notes). 605
- Name Index* 617



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Acknowledgements

The editor and publishers wish to thank the following for permission to use copyright material.

J. Baird Callicott (1982), 'Hume's *Is/Ought* Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic', *Environmental Ethics*, **4**, pp. 163–74. Copyright © 1982 J. Baird Callicott.

Blackwell Publishers for the essays: Henry Shue (1999), 'Global Environment and International Inequality', *International Affairs*, **75**, pp. 531–45; Alan Carter (2000), 'Distributive Justice and Environmental Sustainability', *Heythrop Journal*, **41**, pp. 449–60. Copyright © 2000 Alan Carter and Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Cambridge University Press for the essay: Dale Jamieson (2007), 'When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists', *Utilitas*, **19**, pp. 160–83. Copyright © 2007 Cambridge University Press.

Alan Carter (2004), 'Saving Nature and Feeding People', *Environmental Ethics*, **26**, pp. 339–60. Copyright © 2004 Alan Carter.

Copyright Clearance Center for the essay: Holmes Rolston III (1975), 'Is There an Ecological Ethic?', *Ethics*, **85**, pp. 93–109. Copyright © 1975 University of Chicago Press.

Darren Domsky (2006), 'The Inadequacy of Callicott's Ecological Communitarianism', *Environmental Ethics*, **28**, pp. 395–412. Copyright © 2006 Darren Domsky.

Elsevier Limited for the essay: Dale Jamieson (2005), 'Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice', in Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Richard B. Howarth (eds), *Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics, Ethics: Advances in the Economics of Environmental Resources*, **5**, pp. 217–48.

Ramachandra Guha (1989), 'Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique', *Environmental Ethics*, **11**, pp. 71–83. Copyright © 1989 Ramachandra Guha.

Alan Holland (1996), *Nature – Every Last Drop of It – Is Good*, Thingmount Working Paper Series on the Philosophy of Conservation, Department of Philosophy, Lancaster University, pp. 1–17. Copyright © 1996 Alan Holland.

Indiana University Press for the essay: Val Plumwood (1991), 'Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism', *Hypatia*, **6**, pp. 3–27. Copyright © Val Plumwood.

Journal of Philosophy for the essay: Kenneth E. Goodpaster (1978), 'On Being Morally Considerable', *Journal of Philosophy*, **75**, pp. 308–25. Copyright © Journal of Philosophy, Inc.

Katie McShane (2007), 'Why Environmental Ethics Shouldn't Give Up on Intrinsic Value', *Environmental Ethics*, **29**, pp. 43–61. Copyright © 2007 Katie McShane.

Bryan G. Norton (1984), 'Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism', *Environmental Ethics*, **6**, pp. 131–48. Copyright © 1984 Bryan G. Norton.

Ernest Partridge (1981), 'Why Care About the Future?', in Ernest Partridge (ed.), *Responsibilities to Future Generations*, *Environmental Ethics*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, pp. 203–20. Copyright © 1981 Ernest Partridge.

Pearson Education, Inc. for the essays: Aldo Leopold (1949), 'The Land Ethic', in Michael E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott, George Sessions, Karen J. Warren and John Clark (eds) (1993), *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 95–109; Holmes Rolston III (1996), 'Feeding People versus Saving Nature?', in William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette (eds), *World Hunger and Morality*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 248–67. Copyright © 1996 Prentice-Hall, Inc.; Richard Sylvan (Routley) (1973), 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?', in Michael E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott, George Sessions, Karen J. Warren and John Clark (eds) (1993), *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 12–21. Copyright © 1993 Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Polity Press Limited for the essay: Robin Attfield (2003), 'Can Environmental Ethics make a Difference?', in Robin Attfield, *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 75–84.

Tom Regan (1981), 'The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic', *Environmental Ethics*, **3**, pp. 19–34. Copyright © 1981 Tom Regan.

Springer for the essay: Kristian Skagen Ekeli (2005), 'Giving a Voice to Posterity – Deliberative Democracy and Representation of Future People', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, **18**, pp. 429–50. Copyright © 2005 Springer.

Taylor & Francis (UK) Journals for the essays: Arne Naess (1973), 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary', *Inquiry*, **16**, pp. 95–100. Copyright © 1973 Norwegian Research Councils for Science and the Humanities; R. and V. Routley (1978), 'Nuclear Energy and Obligations to the Future', *Inquiry*, **21**, pp. 133–79. Copyright © 1978 Norwegian Research Councils for Science and the Humanities; Y.S. Lo (2001), 'The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System (1980–2001): An Overview and Critique', *Inquiry*, **44**, pp. 331–58. Copyright © 2001 Taylor & Francis.

Gary Varner (2002), 'Biocentric Individualism', in David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (eds), *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 108–20. Copyright © 2002 Gary Varner.

White Horse Press for the essays: Robin Attfield (2001), 'Postmodernism, Value and Objectivity', *Environmental Values*, **10**, pp. 145–62. Copyright © 2001 White Horse Press; Mary Midgley (1992), 'Beasts Versus the Biosphere?', *Environmental Values*, **1**, pp. 113–21. Copyright © 1992 White Horse Press; Barnabas Dickson (2000), 'The Ethicist Conception of Environmental Problems', *Environmental Values*, **9**, pp. 127–52. Copyright © 2000 White Horse Press.

Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Series Preface

'Ethics' is now a considerable part of all debates about the conduct of public life, in government, economics, law, business, the professions and indeed every area of social and political affairs. The ethical aspects of public life include questions of moral right and wrong in the performance of public and professional roles, the moral justification and critique of public institutions and the choices that confront citizens and professionals as they come to their own moral views about social, economic and political issues.

While there are no moral experts to whom we can delegate the determination of ethical questions, the traditional skills of moral philosophers have been increasingly applied to practical contexts that call for moral assessment. Moreover this is being done with a degree of specialist knowledge of the areas under scrutiny that previously has been lacking from much of the work undertaken by philosophers.

This series brings together essays that exhibit high quality work in philosophy and the social sciences, that is well informed on the relevant subject matter and provides novel insights into the problems that arise in resolving ethical questions in practical contexts.

The volumes are designed to assist those engaged in scholarly research by providing the core essays that all who are involved in research in that area will want to have to hand. Essays are reproduced in full with the original pagination for ease of reference and citation.

The editors are selected for their eminence in the particular area of public and professional ethics. Each volume represents the editor's selection of the most seminal essays of enduring interest in the field.

SEUMAS MILLER AND TOM CAMPBELL
Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (CAPPE)
Australian National University
Charles Sturt University
University of Melbourne



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Introduction

Environmental ethics became a self-conscious branch of activity among philosophers in the early 1970s, with the appearance of three of the essays reprinted here: Richard Routley's paper presented to the World Congress of Philosophy held at Varna, Bulgaria in 1973, Holmes Rolston's essay in *Ethics* of 1975 (both reprinted in Part I), and also Arne Naess's seminal essay on Deep Ecology, published in 1973 in *Inquiry* (see Part II). But twentieth-century reflection on the kind of ethic appropriate to ecosystems had already been pioneered by Aldo Leopold, from whose *Sand County Almanac* (1949) a key extract is also reprinted here (see Part II). Leopold's influence has remained strong particularly among American environmentalists, as in the writings of J. Baird Callicott on the Land Ethic, one of whose essays (from 1982) is also included in Part II. In a very different key, the historical and cultural roots of contemporary ecological problems were controversially discussed by Lynn White Jr in 'The Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' (published in *Science* in 1967), a work that generated an interdisciplinary debate, and was much anthologized; it is briefly discussed below. Vigorous debates have developed on all these and related issues, relating them to matters of gender, global justice, sustainable development and equity between countries, species and generations.

Values and the Environment

The essays in Part I concern whether we need a new environmental ethic, what it would say about value and about our obligations, and whether we could derive it from the phenomena of ecology. In Chapter 1 Richard Routley, writing in 1973, links issues such as these through a thought-experiment, from which he concludes that even trees have independent value and that we have obligations in their regard; since none of this, according to Routley, is recognized in traditional systems of value, we genuinely need a new ethic to accommodate these newly emergent values. His thought-experiment concerns our judgement that the last man, who is himself about to die, acts wrongly if he chops down a tree for no good reason. Critics such as John Passmore (1974) and Thomas Hill (see Chapter 20) have suggested that the last man does wrong not because of the value of the tree but because he infringes a human ideal, and thus harms himself; others have found this reasoning unimpressive, since there must be some factor beyond recklessness or vandalism that makes it wrong to act recklessly or to behave as a vandal. Other critics of Routley's thought-experiment include Keekok Lee (1993). Whether or not Routley's reasoning is accepted, many have endorsed his conclusions, and thus the search for an environmental ethic began. However, not all who have endorsed his conclusions accept that the ethic that we need is a new one, finding recognition of independent value in nature within long-standing traditions – for example in Psalm 104 in the Old Testament. The interpretation of Judaism and Christianity supplied by White (1967) as despotic, anthropocentric and essentially exploitative has been widely recognized as a travesty, besides

ascribing undue influence to beliefs and values, as opposed to economic and institutional factors, upon the course of history (see Attfield, 1999; Whitney, 1993).

Holmes Rolston's essay (Chapter 2) concerns how we can move to ecological 'oughts' from the facts of ecology, and indeed to 'oughts' of any sort from facts such as those concerning health. J. Baird Callicott (see Chapter 9) shows a parallel awareness of how 'oughts' can be derived from facts about the best or the only means to attain shared goals or ends; certainly the mysterious quality of 'ought' language can be dispelled once we explicate 'oughts' as prudential, technical, aesthetic or moral, as long as appeal is then made to appropriate ends or criteria. (For necessarily we *ought* to do what best or alone conduces to what is agreed to be desirable.) But it is less clear why the integrity of ecosystems (or 'integral ecosystems') supplies ought-making criteria (nowadays it is unclear what the criteria are for even the identity of ecosystems, let alone their integrity) or whether ecological 'oughts' emerge with the force of a revelation to those apprised of the relevant facts. Hence Rolston's essay leaves several issues unresolved. (Much the same applies to Callicott's attempt to supply an ecological Humean solution to the is/ought gap remarked by Hume himself (see Callicott's essay (Chapter 9) and the response of Y.S. Lo in *Environmental Values*, 2001).

Routley's method of reasoning from thought-experiments was taken further by Donald Scherer, who in Chapter 3 compares planets of one kind or another that we can either preserve or destroy. While the planet Lifeless turns out to lack any value other than instrumental value, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong with destroying it, most people would judge differently about the planet Flora, which has photosynthesizing, self-repairing and self-reproducing organisms, as well as about the planet Fauna, the organisms of which are not only self-repairing and self-reproducing but also capable of self-motion and perception. Hence those who so judge recognize the presence of intrinsic value on Flora as well as on Fauna. To use a different vocabulary, the scope of moral standing must range beyond sentient creatures. Scherer concludes that it also ranges beyond individuals to biotic systems, but claims such as this have to tackle the problems of the identity of biotic systems, and of what their good consists in; as will be seen in Chapter 19, James Sterba has some salient remarks on these issues. While not everyone shares in the judgements to which Scherer appeals, his conclusions lend support for a broad recognition of intrinsic value and of related environmental obligations. I return to their significance when discussing biocentric approaches in Part III.

Others, however, object to the very concept of intrinsic value, for a variety of metaphysical, epistemological, pragmatist and motivation-related grounds. Two essays are presented here that both identify and seek to reply to such objections. Their claim is that the concept of intrinsic (or non-derivative) value is so central that we commonly presuppose it, and would have to invent it if it did not exist. (This may help explain the centrality of intrinsic value in, for example, Rolston's work: see Rolston, 1988.) However, these two essays concern intrinsic value in slightly different senses. Chapter 4, Robin Attfield's essay of 2001, relates to the intrinsic value of a state or condition of a creature as necessarily supplying a non-derivative reason for protecting, cherishing or promoting it, while Katie McShane's sense in Chapter 5 concerns intrinsic value as the object of certain indispensable attitudes. (Importantly neither essay treats the presence of intrinsic value as automatically conferring rights, or as discernible only through some elusive faculty of intuition.) Possibly both accounts are needed if the connection between value (intrinsic value included) and reasons for action (which some writers of a pragmatist inclination allege to be non-existent) is to be understood.

A different approach to both the status and the scope of value is found in Chapter 6, Alan Holland's *Nature – Every Last Drop of It – Is Good*, published in the University of Lancaster Thingmount Series in 1998. Holland well defends objectivist accounts of goodness against relativizing theorists such as Philippa Foot and (rather like Attfield in *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics*, 1995b) against the value-scepticism of John Mackie, and proceeds to suggest that nature (understood as the particular historical world) is good because nature (in this sense) is constitutive of worthwhile human life. The objection that this does not imply nature's intrinsic value would not trouble Holland, who is a sceptic about that concept. However, it could be replied that only some aspects of nature are constitutive of worthwhile human life, since such life could have evolved much as it is in the absence of any of a number of distant stars. Besides, those who believe that much non-human life is worthwhile (and not only sentient non-human life at that) would have independent grounds for recognition of natural value, although they too would need to recognize limits to such value. Further, if the underlying ground of value is found in worthwhile life, whether human or non-human, then this is what environmentalists should primarily seek to preserve. While much else will have aesthetic value or constitutive value, not every drop will be equally valuable or perhaps valuable at all. Incidentally, Holland suggests that theistic religious believers have to believe not only that the actual world is good, but also that nature could not have been better; but in fact sophisticated believers have good reason to deny that God would have to create the best (Taliaferro, 1998, p. 311). This being so, there seems much more in common between Holland's attitude to nature and that of believers in creation than he allows.

The Land Ethic and Deep Ecology

Part II opens with Aldo Leopold's essay on 'the Land Ethic' (Chapter 7), in which he traces the need for a land ethic in which obligations are recognized to conserve the biotic community. Leopold writes evocatively of the interdependence of the creatures that comprise the land, and argues for holistic obligations to preserve their integrity, as constraints on economic imperatives. 'A thing is right', he declares, 'when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise' (p. 112). This seminal passage has deservedly inspired a great deal of ecological thinking, particularly in America. Yet if regarded as a foundational ethical principle, it becomes disastrous. For individuals (human or otherwise) now have value only insofar as they contribute to the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community, and in many cases this would make their extermination a matter of indifference. Then again, are promises binding only to the extent that performing what was promised preserves ecosystems? As Mary Midgley mentions (see Chapter 14), Leopold's ethical proposals are 'alarming pronouncements' (p. 227). At best, his principle needs to be treated as just one among others; on some views, however, it stands in need of serious qualification, not only because it has become unclear what the integrity of ecosystems consists in, but also because other values are relevant to what is right and wrong, casting doubt on whether Leopold's formula passes muster even in cases where the bearing of biotic integrity can be regarded as clear and relevant.

Whereas Leopold was not writing as a philosopher, holistic views about ethics and society were later set out more systematically by the veteran Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in what has become the best-known exposition of Deep Ecology, an essay reprinted here

as Chapter 8. Commendably, Naess contrasts ecological movements concerned only with the West and the coming decades, and in any event with human interests, with ones whose purview extends to the entire planet, the further future and non-human species of every kind. Movements of the latter kind he designates 'deep', but the label 'Deep Ecology' is reserved for those which include among their values the values of diversity, decentralization and self-realization, which endorse 'biospherical egalitarianism' (the equal right of all organisms to live and blossom) and which take the view that for the sake of other species, the human population should be significantly reduced. Since not all supporters of deep positions would endorse all of this, the possibility emerges of being ecologically deep without being a 'Deep Ecologist'. One of those who developed such a stance was Richard Routley (by now writing as Richard Sylvan), in his formidable 'A Critique of Deep Ecology' (1985).

Meanwhile J. Baird Callicott began publishing a sequence of philosophical writings in defence of Leopold's Land Ethic. Thus in 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair' (1980) the three apexes of his triangle were traditional humanism, the ethics of animal liberation (as advocated by Peter Singer and Tom Regan), and the Land Ethic, with the latter compared to the holistic ethic of Plato's *Republic*. At this stage, Callicott attached to the Land Ethic the view that the population of humans should be reduced to around twice that of bears, a stance from which he resiled in subsequent works; indeed in a later essay, influenced by the thought of Mary Midgley ('Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again', 1989), he attempted to reconcile the Land Ethic with the ethic of animal liberation. By the time of the essay reprinted here as Chapter 9, Callicott had developed a Humean account of ethics as the expression of human attitudes and motivations, supplemented by a Darwinian interpretation of how those attitudes and motivations evolved, and extended by Leopold such that preservationist attitudes applied to all the members of the ecological community. The resulting Land Ethic was represented as the ethic that best tallies with our evolutionary and ecological inheritance.

Callicott's stance has, however, been questioned both by Y.S. Lo and by Darren Domsy (see Chapters 10 and 11). Elsewhere, Lo has contended that Callicott's stance is not only not distinctively Humean but is positively unHumean (a critique consonant with that of Alan Carter (2000), whose differently Humean stance proves to be equally problematic). In Chapter 10 Lo argues that the Land Ethic has undergone three successively more qualified stages in Callicott's writings, but that none of these is successful. He also argues that it needs to develop further to attain consistency. Domsy, however, has more recently argued in Chapter 11 that Callicott's communitarianism is in any case unacceptable, since it conflicts with certain universalist judgements that we make; an alien life form to which we had no ties of community would (or at least could) be recognized as having moral standing (as mattering from the perspective of morality, that is), and hence communitarian criteria of moral standing are insufficient.

While Lo and Domsy have criticized the Land Ethic, other writers have criticized Deep Ecology, in some cases from a Third World or from an ecofeminist perspective. The Third World critique presented in Chapter 12 is by Ramachandra Guha, and takes Deep Ecology (in its American variety) to task for paying insufficient attention to Third World peoples in its concern to preserve species, and thus for being less Third World-oriented than (for example) Naess would have favoured. Guha stresses the importance of involving local people in conservation, and heeding their needs. While Guha's stance is itself open to criticism

for being concerned with human interests only (anthropocentrism), he has a valid point in implying that combatting one form of oppression (in this case of wild nature) needs to avoid generating another. The need for the adherents of environmentalism to take into account the importance of overcoming poverty and thus of development, as well as for developmentalists to heed the case of environmentalists, is further argued in Robin Attfield's, 'Development and Environmentalism' (1994a).

In Chapter 13 Val Plumwood (formerly Routley) supplies a distinctive eco-feminist critique not only of Deep Ecology but of a wide range of environmental philosophy, including the stances of Paul Taylor and of Tom Regan (both of whose writings are represented in Part III). While sympathetic to moves away from anthropocentrism, Plumwood attacks the kind of rationalism that valorizes reason and related forms of respect at the expense of friendship and care (Taylor) or that grounds obligations on rights as against compassion or responsibility (Regan), or that dualistically represents the self as discontinuous or apart from nature and thus in need of expansion into and identification with nature as a whole (Deep Ecology). Deep Ecology in particular generates unnecessary problems through advocating the indistinguishability of self and nature, when in fact we need to grasp the distinctness of the needs of natural things from our own; to treat 'holistic self-merger' with nature as the only alternative to egoistic accounts of the atomistic self is a false choice. Instead, we need to challenge the implicit egoistic assumptions of such rationalism, with its endorsement of the enlarged egoism of the expanded self (or Self), now entitled to fight in self-defence. We need to be liberated from such rationalism towards healthier, relational conceptions of the human, and from instrumentalism towards a healthier respect or care for nature as other. Plumwood also paves the way for enlarging critiques of anthropocentrism so as to incorporate some of the critiques offered by feminism (and by socialism too). Thus interdependent accounts of the self are preferable to ones based on self-merger, and a rejection of rationalism is advocated for the sake, in part, of rationality itself. It is shown how holistic accounts of the self and of ethics need to be qualified by relational ones, and how criticisms of traditional dualisms can be made without abandoning distinctions between (say) carers and objects of care. Indeed not all dualisms should (I suggest) be rejected, except when the phrase 'dualism' is restricted to oppositions that are essentially exploitative.

Mary Midgley's essay 'Beasts Versus the Biosphere?' (Chapter 14) could also be read as critical of the ethical holism of Deep Ecology, but it is equally critical of Animal Liberation, whether in the utilitarian version advocated by Peter Singer or in the rights-based version of Regan. Midgley urges the need to balance the apparently absolutist principles of both these movements, which (it will be recollected) Callicott (1980) had argued to be in opposition, a stance to which Mark Sagoff (1984) has added his support, albeit on different grounds. While opposing unqualified allegiance either to Deep Ecology or to Animal Liberation, and supporting approaches that reconcile the principles of both these positions, Midgley carefully considers the case for culling wild creatures in order to rescue their habitat, and concludes that while we should minimize harm, and should not, for example, pretend that concern for ecosystems justifies hunting (either in the British or in the American sense of the term), there will still be cases where there is no alternative; yet she also presents the case for an increasing reluctance to cull as increasingly intelligent creatures are considered. At the same time, she rejects attempts to derive ethics from any single principle (while also evincing unhappiness with dogmatic varieties of pluralism). Readers who endorse her practical conclusions may still

hesitate before concluding in advance that no single principle could ever suffice to underpin defensible ethical norms.

Biocentric Approaches

Part III concerns biocentric theories, according to which all living creatures have moral standing. The notion of moral standing (or, as he calls it, ‘moral considerability’) is explained in Kenneth Goodpaster’s 1978 essay (Chapter 15) and applies to entities that warrant moral attention or consideration for their own sake. To the question of which entities have such considerability or standing, Goodpaster replies that it is ones with a good of their own, and that this amounts to all living creatures (a biocentric theory of moral standing). In concluding thus, Goodpaster might be regarded as resuscitating a version of Albert Schweitzer’s advocacy of ‘reverence for life’ (1929). But Goodpaster carefully distinguishes his position from any belief in the sentience of all life (for he rejects both this belief and the view that sentience is necessary for standing) and equally from the view that all holders of moral standing, sentient or non-sentient, have the same moral significance (for he is not committed to holders of standing being significant to an equal degree). He argues rather from the centrality in ethics of beneficence, which suggests that whatever has a good of its own warrants moral consideration.

As we have seen, Goodpaster’s biocentrism rejects one kind of egalitarianism, the kind which regards all living creatures as equally worthy of moral consideration (a view close to the ‘biospherical egalitarianism’ of Naess). But in taking into account the different interests of living creatures, Goodpaster’s position is consistent with Peter Singer’s principle of the equal consideration of equal interests (1979 and 1993), and thus with a different and more discriminating variety of egalitarianism. This relation to egalitarianism also holds good of my own biocentrism (see Attfield, 1983a, 1995b and 2003). (Hence it is misleading to label such forms of biocentrism ‘inegalitarian’, as Alan Carter (2005) does.) Where Goodpaster (and I) diverge from Singer is in rejecting sentience as the boundary of moral standing, and recognizing that many interests (such as health) that do not turn on sentience can be upheld or endangered, both in non-sentient creatures and also (importantly) in sentient ones as well. (A similar point is argued by Tom Regan in Chapter 17.)

A different kind of biocentrism was presented in 1981 by the veteran ethicist Paul Taylor (Chapter 16). Taylor disowns both anthropocentric and holistic norms, and advocates instead a life-centred ethic of respect for nature, in which agents recognize that each living thing has a good of its own, the realization of which is intrinsically valuable (or worthy of being preserved or promoted) and is to be pursued for its own sake. Respect for nature is comparable with and supplements a Kantian respect for persons. However, in Taylor’s version of biocentrism, not only is human superiority denied, but each living thing is held *equally* worthy of respect, irrespective of differences of interests. Accordingly ‘biospherical egalitarianism’ (the principle propounded by Naess) here re-emerges. Taylor tackles the implications in his book, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (1986). The practical principles there presented are defensible ones, recognizing that human needs have to be satisfied, but these principles are predictably and inevitably incompatible with his interspecies egalitarianism. A consistent and operational biocentric ethical system has to recognize, as Goodpaster does, differences

of moral significance between the bearers of moral standing, something unattainable given Taylor's radical egalitarianism.

In the same year, in 'The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic' (Chapter 17) Tom Regan mounted a defense against standard objections to the moral standing (in Goodpaster's sense) of non-conscious living creatures. He also claimed that any ethic that failed to recognize the moral standing of any non-human creatures is not an environmental ethic at all (as opposed to being an ethic for 'the use of the environment'), but this restriction would have the unfortunate implication that anthropocentric theories are not contributions to the discipline of environmental ethics at all. (It does, however, help explain how critics of biocentrism such as Janna Thompson (1990) came to regard themselves as opposed to environmental ethics *as such*.) One of the objections considered by Regan against the moral standing of non-conscious beings is that what is objectionable in environmentally destructive behaviour consists not in ignoring this moral standing but in infringing an ideal of human conduct that rejects vandalism and unjustified destruction, an argument presented by Hill (see Chapter 20) and Passmore (1974). Regan replies that such an ideal becomes unintelligible if no independent value is recognized in the entities that are to be protected from vandalism and destruction. Another objection is the suggestion of Mark Sagoff (1974) that the value of nature consists not in its properties but in its expression of the values of one or another culture (such as the value of freedom in the culture of Americans); to this view Regan replies that cultural values can swing and lurch beyond all recognition, and also that on this basis the values of any one culture provide no protection whatever for the environment of another.

Regan further claims that the development of an environmental ethic requires that we postulate inherent value in nature. A thing's inherent value both depends on its objective properties and makes an attitude of admiring respect towards it appropriate. But this requirement seems actually to disqualify the realization of a thing's good (not strictly a property of the thing itself) from being inherently valuable (the paradigm of intrinsic value, according to Taylor), and similarly seems to disqualify other states of creatures such as their flourishing (something desirable but not admirable), around which an environmental ethic could in fact be built. Regan's concept is unobjectionable in itself, but forms no substitute for the potentially pivotal concept of intrinsic value. He proceeds to reject any consequentialist environmental ethic, and yet such an ethic could feasibly be developed around the promotion or preservation of intrinsically valuable states both in humans and in non-human creatures. Here Taylor is wiser, since his notion of intrinsic value is explicitly compatible both with consequentialist theories and with non-consequentialist (or deontological) ones. Indeed followers of Regan are sometimes tempted to make the inherent value of his concept the basis of rights (a move Regan seems to have avoided), but such a move foregoes the theoretical advances made by Goodpaster in distinguishing between the concept of rights, with its narrower sphere, and that of moral standing or considerability, applicable as it is to living creatures as a whole. It is notable that in Regan's essay nothing is made to rest on rights, and that moral standing is recognized to have a wider scope than their usually recognized bearers. Hence even if Regan puts too much stress on rights elsewhere (as perhaps he does in *The Case for Animal Rights*, 1983), his case here is unaffected by this particular criticism of Plumwood (as introduced above).

Donald Scherer's essay (reprinted as Chapter 3) represented an important advance for biocentrism. Through the thought-experiment depicted above concerning the presence or

absence of value on the imaginary planets Lifeless, Flora and Fauna, he contrived to show not only that it makes sense to value states of Flora and Fauna but not of Lifeless (until that planet is modified so as to have the potential for supporting life), but also that an ethic can be individualistic without being either egoistic or anthropocentric, and can recognize independent value while remaining teleological (or consequentialist). We can thus endorse familiar criticisms of egoism and of anthropocentrism without resorting to the kind of totalitarian holism of the early Callicott. At the same time, Scherer did not entirely reject ethical holism (any more than Goodpaster did), and may actually veer too close to such holism when he makes the value of individuals dependent on ecosystems and their value because they are physically dependent on ecosystems. (To this it could be replied that the dependence of the human passengers of lifeboats on their vessel does not make their individual value dependent either on lifeboats or on *their* value. Maybe we should accordingly value ecosystems because of the lives – or the flourishing lives – that they make possible, rather than the other way round.) Yet Scherer's stance shows how a largely individual-centred ethic can avoid both inadequate models of the self as egoistic (as in Plumwood's critique of Deep Ecology) and the assumption that human concerns must be confined to human interests. An environmental ethic can value the good of all living creatures (present and future) without either making them all of equal significance (Taylor) or prioritizing the common good over the value of individuals (early Callicott). Indeed Scherer's thought-experiment strengthens Routley's thought-experiment of the Last Man with regard to the location of intrinsic value in all self-maintaining and self-replicating organisms with a good of their own.

Shortly before Scherer's essay was published, my first defence of biocentrism appeared under the title 'The Good of Trees' (Attfeld, 1981), including replies to theories holding that the good of non-conscious creatures was dependent on either human prescriptions or human interests, or at least on the good of sentient creatures, and also incorporating a revised presentation of Routley's Last Man thought-experiment. This defence was supplemented in *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Attfeld, 1983a). Some of the biocentrist conclusions of 'The Good of Trees' were endorsed by Gary E. Varner in 'Biological Functions and Biological Interests' (1990), who added criticisms of the version presented there of Routley's thought-experiment, but did not notice that the version of this argument presented in my 1983 book was immune to several of his criticisms, and that his criticisms of appeals to thought-experiments had also been answered in my essay 'Methods of Ecological Ethics' (Attfeld, 1983b). (Like 'Development and Environmentalism' and 'The Good of Trees', this essay was reprinted in my *Environmental Philosophy: Principles and Prospects*, Attfeld, 1994b.) Further sentientist criticisms later appeared from Janna Thompson (1990, replying overtly to Paul Taylor) and from Frederick Kaufman (1994). To Thompson I replied in the second edition of *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (1991, pp. 205–7); while her anti-holism points were strong ones, Goodpaster's argument (among others) continues to uphold a strong morally relevant distinction between living creatures and artefacts. To Kaufman's related arguments, I replied in 'Preferences, Health, Interests and Value' (Attfeld, 1995a); human interests, as well as the interests of non-sentient creatures, I argued there, are often independent of human desires and preferences. In Chapter 18, Gary E. Varner returned to an ingenious defence of this same conclusion, citing further thought-experiments in support of his (then) biocentric stance. Although Varner has acknowledged problems for these thought-experiments (see his review of Nicholas Agar, *Life's Intrinsic Value*, 2003), they are arguably

defensible ones, despite Keekok Lee's criticisms of what is nowadays called 'The Last Person Argument' (1993).

A different kind of biocentrism has been vigorously defended of late by James Sterba, for whom biocentrism involves commitment to the equality of species (as for Taylor). In Chapter 19 Sterba recognizes that such a stance generates a dilemma, for our practical principles will apparently either be consistent but intolerable or inconsistently allow of human self-defence. His contribution is to advance fundamental species-neutral principles allowing any species to resort to self-defence in certain circumstances. Sterba presents some quite cogent principles, but it may be doubted whether he can succeed without recognition of the difference made by different interests and capacities, or whether, in the absence of a consequentialist grounding, such principles can be reliably identified merely on a formal basis. (Confidence in Sterba's reasoning is not enhanced when the second formal argument on page 315 is seen to involve the fallacy of an undistributed middle term.) However, besides furnishing some cogent interspecies principles, Sterba introduces a valuable discussion of the difficulties involved in extending biocentrism to ecosystems. Given the widespread abandonment of belief in the balance of nature on the part of ecologists, and recognition that disequilibrium is as much the norm as equilibrium, then nothing in particular can be recognized as good for biotic communities, even if they can be identified as such in the first place; yet these problems for ecocentric stances leave biocentrism intact. Whether or not Sterba's radically egalitarian biocentrism is cogent enough to remain intact, this verdict readily applies to biocentrism based on equal consideration for equal interests, as defended in this Introduction. Such biocentrism needs to be allied to a defensible interhuman ethic such as practice-consequentialism; I have attempted to present and defend such an ethical system in *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics* (Attfield, 1995b), and also in *Environmental Ethics* (Attfield, 2003).

Virtue Ethics and Human Values

Virtue ethics is the normative stance according to which (as in Aristotle) virtues and their cultivation are central to ethics, and those actions are right which the virtuous person would adopt. While some ethicists (including myself) accept the first of these claims, others, including Thomas Hill, appear to adopt both. In Chapter 20 Hill rejects belief in the intrinsic value of non-sentient creatures (or of their flourishing), and argues that what makes it wrong to destroy segments of nature is the way this infringes an ideal encompassing humility, gratitude and sensitivity. These virtuous attitudes remain virtuous even for those who regard natural entities as no more than either resources or objects of aesthetic appreciation, and give people a reason to preserve such entities. We have already seen how Regan replies to such a position that there must be some independent value in the entities preserved to make the virtuous attitudes virtuous ones; and it may be added that the criterion of what the virtuous person would do is implausible as a criterion of rightness, since rightness seems a more far-reaching concept than this (particularly in a technological age). Besides, if Aristotle is right about virtues being dispositions to act rightly, we surely need an independent concept of right action, rather than making rightness turn on virtuousness. Hill partly adopts his stance because theories of intrinsic value seem to him not to supply well-grounded reasons for actions such as preservation; he assumes that such theories involve intuitionism, and stresses the instability of intuitions. But intrinsic value theories need not be intuitionist in any such

sense, and can (as we have seen) reason about the location of intrinsic value. Besides, unlike G.E. Moore, intrinsic value theorists can recognize conceptual connections between value and reasons, such that wherever there is intrinsic value there are non-derivative reasons for relevant agents to promote or preserve what has such value; and if so, there is no need to look to virtues to provide such reasons, provide them as they may. Further, Hill's stance is implicitly a form of anthropocentrism: environmental destruction, he holds, is wrong because it undermines the character of the person who performs it. This brings us back to the question of whether anthropocentrism can really supply adequate grounds for preserving the natural environment.

This view is defended by Bryan Norton in Chapter 21. Several other philosophers have also supported this stance, including John Benson (2000) and David Cooper (1995), while John O'Neill (1993) has upheld it on an Aristotelian basis. I have replied to such arguments in *Environmental Ethics* (Atfield, 2003, pp. 65–75); these approaches creditably present a broad account of human flourishing, but do not show that this basis is either necessary or sufficient for environmental duties, and represent the range of human motivation as unduly narrow. Norton's distinctive line involves rejecting strong anthropocentrism, with its reliance on felt (human) preferences as determining value, but upholding weak anthropocentrism, which focuses instead on considered preferences, preferences which Norton believes capable of sifting rational from irrational desires. (Here, I would reply that there is no guarantee that human interests, even when thus understood, supply sufficient grounds for enough environmental protection.) Norton also claims that environmental ethics has to be non-individualistic, arguing for this on the basis of Derek Parfit's Non-Identity Problem (1984). Parfit does certainly show that not all obligations are owed to identifiable individuals, since many relate instead to whoever there will be in a certain tract of the future. But this stance, as I have argued in *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (1983a) and since, does not involve abandoning individualism, but rather taking into account the possible individuals who may succeed us in one future or another. Or, if this conclusion is for some reason regarded as holistic itself (perhaps because it excludes the kind of individualism on which everything turns on rights), it nevertheless does not remotely involve the kind of holism found in the works of (say) Leopold, Rolston and Callicott, or derive the main value of individuals from that of systems or species. It can (and often does) embody concern that those natural resources dependent on ecosystems be preserved, without ultimately deriving this concern from the value of systems or collectives.

The answer given by the leading philosopher Bernard Williams to his own question 'Must a Concern for the Environment be Centred on Human Beings?' (Chapter 22) is affirmative; environmental values need not be restricted to human interests, but must still reflect 'human values', values, that is, which human beings can 'understand themselves as pursuing and respecting' (p. 352). According to Williams, however, these values probably do not answer to non-human interests, since in his view few such interests have any 'claim' on us, and those that do not are morally irrelevant. But there is a large implicit assertion here: human beings cannot understand themselves as pursuing or respecting the interests of most non-human creatures. Common experience casts doubt on this suggestion (sufficiently to sustain the credibility of biocentrism in some of its versions). Instead, Williams considers that our 'Promethean fear' of nature and its sublimity encodes further values concerning the independence of nature as backdrop of human life and limits to the possibility of controlling it. Perhaps for some

this psychological story rings true, but the nature, content and value of these values remain unilluminated. Williams does not explicitly claim that environmental concern rests largely on values grounded in preserving the framework of human culture and agency, as opposed to seeking to discredit contrary theories. If, however, someone were to make this claim, it would give human theorists an unduly self-preoccupied stance. Perhaps this claim (minus 'largely') embodies an aspect of the truth; but the implicit suggestion that human beings can only understand themselves as pursuing or respecting either their own interests or the conditions of their own agency has only to be articulated to be exposed for the exaggeration that it is. Yet Williams well criticizes (p. 355) those environmental philosophers who both make human beings part of nature, on a par with other creatures, and at the same time persist in stressing human responsibilities in its regard. There is a sound critique of the ethics of biospherical egalitarianism, and of some Deep Ecology, buried here. In an essay too ample to include in this volume, another prominent philosopher, David Wiggins (2000), has developed Williams's themes of human values and nature's sublimity, stressing that 'the human scale of values' extends far enough beyond 'human values' (a phrase used by Wiggins to mean 'values that concern human flourishing': p. 8) to include disinterested concern for the survival and well-being of wild creatures and generally 'the great framework for a life on earth in which ... human beings can find meaning' (p. 10; cf. p. 18), but which has latterly become vulnerable. This is a profound essay, imaginatively supportive of green concerns (far more so than Williams), despite scepticism about some forms of environmental ethics and metaphysics; yet it could be read as implying that human environmental concern (and 'the human scale of values') is confined to this framework alone, as opposed to other frameworks (such as Scherer's *Flora*) related to other worlds, where no human has ever found meaning or perhaps will ever find it. Even sophisticated attempts to explore and sift anthropocentrism may thus fail to distinguish truisms (such as 'all our values are human values') from traps (such as 'our ethical concerns are confined to what benefits us or makes our lives meaningful').

Is there still a place for environmental virtue ethics? Dale Jamieson gives an affirmative answer in Chapter 23, but on a utilitarian or consequentialist basis, granted that other mainstream ethical approaches (Kantianism, contractarianism and common-sense pluralism) are intrinsically impotent over environmental issues, and that utilitarianism takes outcomes seriously. However, utilitarian calculation in environmental matters leads to madness or despair, and utilitarians should rather cultivate appropriately green habits and virtues, regardless of their beliefs about others' behaviour (together with supporting suitable green governmental legislation). Thus the value of virtues is both crucial and derivative; Jamieson is a virtue ethicist in recognizing their centrality, but is actually denying the other theme of virtue ethics, that virtue is somehow more basic than and definitive of rightness. Here he seems right on both counts. He goes on to consider objections based on worlds in which others' behaviour is foreseeably and uniformly irresponsible, but stresses among his replies that his utilitarian virtue theory well fits the world in which we actually live (a reply which leaves theoretical issues unresolved but could be crucial for actual campaigners and policy-makers). Jamieson concludes with an attempt to identify green virtues, building in part on the work of Hill, and adding temperance and cooperativeness. This attempt deserves to be taken further; indeed there is much in this forward-looking essay for both ethicists and policy-makers to develop. Jamieson's ideas on confronting climate change in particular are developed in Chapter 27 in Part V.

Equity and the Future

Obligations towards the future have rightly preoccupied environmental ethics at least since the publication by Richard Routley and Val Routley (later Richard Sylvan and Val Plumwood) of 'Nuclear Energy and Obligations to the Future' (Chapter 24) in 1978. Using a graphic thought-experiment, they affirm duties towards distant future generations, as well as immediate successors, and at the same time expose the inadequacies of theories such as Rawlsianism (which struggle with duties to parties not party to the contract) and the theory of Passmore, for whom obligations are owed to our successors only; here they adduce the wrongness of policies that benefit the near future but undermine the further future (rather as Derek Parfit was to do in his later thought-experiment about Conservation and Depletion, in *Reasons and Persons*, 1984, pp. 361–64). The significance of Parfit's discussions of future obligations and of what he named 'the Non-Identity Problem' has already been touched on above in connection with Norton's 'Weak Anthropocentrism' essay. The Routleys' case against nuclear energy generation (based on such obligations) can be left to speak for itself. But (as is explained in my *Environmental Ethics*, Attfield, 2003) these obligations, contrary to what the Routleys suggest, can in my view be reconciled with consequentialism (particularly of a biocentrist and practice-related variety), and (it can here be added) with the virtue-related variety commended by Jamieson.

More light on obligations to the future is shed in Ernest Partridge's 'Why Care About the Future?' (Chapter 25). His response to the sceptic (who notes that the future has never done anything for us) is that caring about the future is not a contractual obligation but something owed to ourselves, because of our need for self-transcendence. Such advocacy could seem to embody the rationalist self of Val Plumwood's critique; for a self needing to be transcended might be held to be too narrowly conceived. But Partridge is aware that when selves need to be transcended they are alienated selves, and draws attention to the widespread need to overcome alienation; he also claims that human beings standardly have self-transcending tendencies in any case. Partridge could also be construed (and criticized) as developing the anthropocentrist line (ascribed to O'Neill, Benson, Cooper and Norton and criticized as insufficient above), which represents ecological concern as a human need, and human need as the ground of such concern. It could be replied on his behalf that such concern can and often does fulfil needs for larger loyalties, even if human needs can be satisfied without it, and that although it is not the sole or sufficient ground for ecological concern, it remains an important one. Partridge's case is thus a central reply to the sceptic, without exhausting what needs to be said. Future obligations are further discussed in my *Environmental Ethics* (Attfield, 2003, ch. 4).

Obligations to the future converge with concern for underdeveloped countries in the matter of international equity, discussed by Henry Shue in 'Global Environment and International Inequality' (Chapter 26) in the context of climate change. Shue defends three diverse principles, all of which suggest that the costs of global environmental problems should initially be borne by the wealthy industrialized states. Shue is aware of the growing contributions of states such as China and India to these problems, but takes seriously the unsatisfied needs of many of the people of those countries which need to be satisfied, and in practice can only be satisfied through electricity generation involving carbon emissions. Environmentalists can easily overlook the need to rectify global inequalities, and thus to merge campaigns for green causes with the cause of human development (reconcilable, as the Brundtland Report (World Commission on

Environment and Development, 1987) demonstrated, in the goal of sustainable development). While equity is not confined to international issues, and also relates to some of the topics considered above (such as relations between species and between generations), international aspects here receive proper recognition.

This is also true of Dale Jamieson's essay 'Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice' (Chapter 27), of which the context is once again ways of tackling global warming. Jamieson argues convincingly for the need for policies of mitigation as well as of adaptation, and within mitigation for the distribution of emission quotas on a per capita basis, and thus (implicitly) the approach of Contraction and Convergence, in which global emissions would be stabilized and then gradually reduced (Contraction), and distributed proportionately to each state's population (Convergence). States needing to emit more than their quota could then purchase the surplus quota from one or another less industrialized state, transactions with a significant redistributive effect. Jamieson replies well to objections to all this including those from a Rawlsian or contractarian perspective. Although critics have suggested problems for Contraction and Convergence, this approach seems much the most efficient and fairest way ahead, and compatible at that both with ecological concerns and with the kind of biocentric consequentialism defended above.

Issues of equity also include equitable decision-making, and here future interests are in danger of being disregarded. One philosopher who has proposed and defended a way of overcoming this disregard is Kristian Skagen Ekeli, whose 'Giving a Voice to Posterity' is reprinted here as Chapter 28. Ekeli proposes the inclusion in legislatures of representatives of future generations, and ably defends a particular approach to appointing them. Ekeli is not alone in making such a proposal (see Atfield, 1997), but this essay comprises one of the most detailed and compelling treatments of the subject.

Preservation, Development and Sustainability

Must feeding people always take precedence over saving nature? Holmes Rolston, by now the doyen of environmental ethics, discusses this question in Chapter 29 and concludes that there could well be circumstances where things are otherwise. But the circumstances that he specifies may not be those of the actual world, or may not justify his conclusion; there may be no need to choose between development and preservation, either in our world or in worlds at all like it. Replies to Rolston include that of Andrew Brennan (1998), who stresses the need to take social causes and structural factors into account more than Rolston and Deep Ecologists generally contrive to do, that of Atfield (1998) and Alan Carter's 'Saving Nature and Feeding People' (Chapter 30), selected because, in addition to replying to Rolston, it exposes the limitations of Garrett Hardin's widely reprinted 'The Tragedy of the Commons' (1968) and explains how the roads to Third World development and to preservation are frequently one and the same.

Earlier, Carter had discussed how to understand the challenging concept of sustainable development in 'Distributive Justice and Environmental Sustainability' (Chapter 31). Replying to Andrew Dobson's *Justice and the Environment* (1998), Carter explains how sustainable development (the agreed goal of the Rio Summit of 1992) need not be construed as perpetual development, and can be understood to mean the kind of development that puts in place the requirements of sustainable living or, as he puts it, of 'development for sustainability'. This

cogent construal of the concept of sustainable development enables him to contest Dobson's view that sustainable development is an anthropocentric notion, and disclose that it is at least compatible with a biocentric approach, concerned to preserve the natural environment for its own sake as well as for the sake of human beings. Such reconciling work is important, in view of the significance of sustained development; this crucial goal is seen not to be in inevitable conflict with environmental concerns (rather as Carter was later to argue in reply to Rolston). Carter goes on to argue that unjust social orders are as such unsustainable ones, and that this is why the struggles for justice and sustainability cannot be divorced.

Making a Difference

In face of advocacy of environmental ethics changing not only public opinion but also public behaviour and policy, Barnabas Dickson argues in Chapter 32 that such influence is virtually inconceivable, in view of the economic forces stacked against both consumers and managers, however well-intentioned, and disinclining voters to vote for change. Robin Attfield's reply in Chapter 33 (an extract from *Environmental Ethics*, 2003), which completes this collection, argues with the aid of examples that both consumers and voters can and sometimes do achieve changes (and to policies and structures at that), and thus that, within limits (see Whitney, 1993), the study and practice of environmental ethics itself can also make a difference.

If so, the pursuit of environmental ethics need not be seen as just an academic exercise. Sifting our values and assumptions is important both in itself, and because of the interconnectedness of philosophy and life in the world. My hope is that readers will be encouraged by these essays both to read beyond them (particularly as so much good work has had to be omitted here) and to apply their messages to practicalities and practical decisions.

References

- Attfield, Robin (1981), 'The Good of Trees', *Journal of Value Inquiry*, **15**, pp. 35–54 (reprinted in Attfield, 1994b).
- Attfield, Robin (1983a), *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, Oxford: Blackwell; New York: Columbia University Press (2nd edn, Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1991).
- Attfield, Robin (1983b), 'Methods of Ecological Ethics', *Metaphilosophy*, **14**, pp. 195–208 (reprinted in Attfield, 1994b).
- Attfield, Robin (1994a), 'Development and Environmentalism', in Robin Attfield, *Environmental Philosophy: Principles and Prospects*, Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, pp. 221–35.
- Attfield, Robin (1994b), *Environmental Philosophy: Principles and Prospects*, Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate.
- Attfield, Robin (1995a), 'Preferences, Health, Interests and Value', *Electronic Journal of Applied Philosophy*, **3**, 2, May, pp. 7–15 (of hard copy).
- Attfield, Robin (1995b), *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics*, Amsterdam and Atlanta: Éditions Rodopi.
- Attfield, Robin (1997), 'Discounting, Jamieson's Trilemma and Representing the Future', in T. Hayward and J. O'Neill (eds), *Justice, Property and the Environment: Social and Legal Perspectives*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 85–96.
- Attfield, Robin (1998), 'Saving Nature, Feeding People and Ethics', *Environmental Values*, **7**, 3, pp. 255–68.

- Attfield, Robin (1999), *The Ethics of the Global Environment*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Attfield, Robin (2003), *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Polity; Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Benson, John (2000), *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction with Readings*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Brennan, Andrew (1998), 'Poverty, Puritanism and Environmental Conflict', *Environmental Values*, 7, 3, pp. 305–31.
- Callicott, J. Baird (1980), 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair', *Environmental Ethics*, 2, 4, pp. 311–38.
- Callicott, J. Baird (1989), 'Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again', in J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 49–59.
- Carter, Alan (2000), 'Humean Nature', *Environmental Values*, 9, 1, pp. 3–37.
- Carter, Alan (2005), 'Inegalitarian Biocentric Consequentialism, the Minimax Implication and Multidimensional Value Theory: A Brief Proposal for a New Direction in Environmental Ethics', *Utilitas*, 17, 1, pp. 62–84.
- Cooper, David E. (1995), 'Other Species and Moral Reason', in David E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer (eds), *Just Environments: Intergenerational, International and Interspecies Issues*, London: Routledge, pp. 137–48.
- Dobson, Andrew (1998), *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Dimensions of Social Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foot, Philippa (1985), 'Utilitarianism and the Virtues', *Mind*, 94, 374, pp. 196–209.
- Hardin, Garrett (1968), 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, 162, pp. 1243–48.
- Kaufman, Frederik (1994), 'Machines, Sentience and the Scope of Morality', *Environmental Ethics*, 16, 1, pp. 57–70.
- Lee, Keekok (1993), 'Instrumentalism and the Last Person Argument', *Environmental Ethics*, 15, 4, pp. 333–44.
- Leopold, Aldo (1949), *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lo, Y.S. (2001), 'A Humean Argument for the Land Ethic?', *Environmental Values*, 10, 4, pp. 523–39.
- Mackie, J.L. (1977), *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Harmondsworth, UK and New York: Penguin.
- Midgley, Mary (1983), *Animals and Why They Matter*, Harmondsworth, UK and New York: Penguin.
- Moore, G.E. (1903), *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Neill, John (1993), *Ecology, Policy and Politics: Human Well-Being and the Natural World*, London: Routledge.
- Parfit, Derek (1984), *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Passmore, John (1974), *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, London: Duckworth.
- Regan, Tom (1983), *The Case for Animal Rights*, London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rolston, Holmes, III (1988), *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Sagoff, Mark (1974), 'Preserving the Natural Environment', *Yale Law Journal*, 84, 2, pp. 205–67.
- Sagoff, Mark (1984), 'Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce', *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 22, 2, pp. 297–307.
- Schweitzer, Albert (1929), *The Philosophy of Civilisation*, Part 2, 'Civilisation and Ethics' (2nd edn), London: C.T. Campion.
- Singer, Peter (1979), *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2nd edn, 1993).

- Sylvan (formerly Routley), Richard (1985), 'A Critique of Deep Ecology', *Radical Philosophy*, **40**, pp. 2–12 and **41**, pp. 10–22.
- Taliaferro, Charles (ed.) (1988), *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taylor, Paul (1986), *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Thompson, Janna (1990), 'A Refutation of Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics*, **12**, 2, pp. 147–60.
- Varner, Gary E. (1990), 'Biological Functions and Biological Interests', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, **28**, 2, pp. 251–70.
- Varner, Gary E. (2003), 'Review of Nicholas Agar, *Life's Intrinsic Value*', *Environmental Ethics*, **25**, 4, pp. 413–16.
- White, Lynn, Jr (1967), 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science*, **155**, 37, pp. 1203–7.
- Whitney, Elspeth (1993), 'Lynn White, Ecotheology and History', *Environmental Ethics*, **15**, 2, pp. 151–69.
- Wiggins, David (2000), 'Nature, Respect for Nature, and the Human Scale of Values', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, **C**, pp. 1–32.
- World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), *Our Common Future* (Brundtland Report), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Part I
Values and the Environment



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[1]

Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?

Richard Sylvan (Routley)

Richard Sylvan (formerly Routley) is a fellow with the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University in Canberra. With Don Mannison and Michael McRobbie, he edited Environmental Philosophy.

1

It is increasingly said that civilization, Western civilization at least, stands in need of a new ethic (and derivatively of a new economics) setting out people's relations to the natural environment, in Leopold's words "an ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it."¹ It is not of course that old and prevailing ethics do not deal with man's relation to nature; they do, and on the prevailing view man is free to deal with nature as he pleases, i.e., his relations with nature, insofar at least as they do not affect others, are not subject to moral censure. Thus assertions such as "Crusoe ought not to be mutilating those trees" are significant and morally determinate but, inasmuch at least as Crusoe's actions do not interfere with others, they are false or do not hold—and trees are not, in a good sense, moral objects.² It is to this, to the values and evaluations of the prevailing ethics, that Leopold and others in fact take exception. Leopold regards as subject to moral criticism, as wrong, behavior that on prevailing views is morally permissible. But it is not, as Leopold

This essay was originally published in *Proceedings of the XV World Congress of Philosophy*, No. 1. Varna, Bulgaria, 1973, pp. 205–210. Reprinted with permission of author.

seems to think, that such behavior is beyond the scope of the prevailing ethics and that an *extension* of traditional morality is required to cover such cases, to fill a moral void. If Leopold is right in his criticism of prevailing conduct what is required is a *change* in the ethics, in attitudes, values and evaluations. For as matters stand, as he himself explains, men do not feel morally ashamed if they interfere with a wilderness, if they maltreat the land, extract from it whatever it will yield, and then move on; and such conduct is not taken to interfere with and does not rouse the moral indignation of others. "A farmer who clears the woods off a 75% slope, turns his cows into the clearing, and dumps its rainfall, rocks, and soil into the community creek, is still (if otherwise decent) a respected member of society."³ Under what we shall call an *environmental ethic* such traditionally permissible conduct would be accounted morally wrong, and the farmer subject to proper moral criticism.

Let us grant such evaluations for the purpose of the argument. What is not so clear is that a *new* ethic is required even for such radical judgments. For one thing it is none too clear what is going to count as a new ethic, much as it is often unclear whether a new development in physics counts as a new physics or just as a modification or extension of the old. For, notoriously, ethics are not clearly articulated or at all well worked out, so that the application of identity criteria for ethics may remain obscure.⁴ Furthermore we tend to cluster a family of ethical systems which do not differ on core or fundamental principles together as one ethic; e.g. the Christian ethic, which is an umbrella notion covering a cluster of differing and even competing systems. In fact then there are two other possibilities, apart from a new environmental ethic, which might cater for the evaluations, namely that of an extension or modification of the prevailing ethics or that of the development of principles that are already encompassed or latent within the prevailing ethic. The second possibility, that environmental evaluations can be incorporated within (and ecological problems solved within) the framework of prevailing Western ethics, is open because there isn't a single ethical system uniquely assumed in Western civilization: on many issues, and especially on controversial issues such as infanticide, women's rights, and drugs, there are competing sets of principles. Talk of a new ethic and prevailing ethics tends to suggest a sort of monolithic structure, a uniformity, that prevailing ethics, and even a single ethic, need not have.

Indeed Passmore has mapped out three important traditions in Western ethical views concerning man's relation to nature; a dominant tradition, the despotic position, with man as despot (or tyrant), and two lesser traditions, the stewardship position, with man as custodian, and the co-operative position with man as perfecter.⁵ Nor are these the only traditions; primitivism is another, and both romanticism and mysticism have influenced Western views.

14 *Environmental Ethics*

The dominant Western view is simply inconsistent with an environmental ethic; for according to it nature is the dominion of man and he is free to deal with it as he pleases (since—at least on the mainstream Stoic-Augustine view—it exists only for his sake), whereas on an environmental ethic man is not so free to do as he pleases. But it is not quite so obvious that an environmental ethic cannot be coupled with one of the lesser traditions. Part of the problem is that the lesser traditions are by no means adequately characterized anywhere, especially when the religious backdrop is removed, e.g. *who* is man steward for and responsible to? However both traditions are inconsistent with an environmental ethic because they imply policies of complete interference, whereas on an environmental ethic some worthwhile parts of the earth's surface should be preserved from substantial human interference, whether of the "improving" sort or not. Both traditions would in fact prefer to see the earth's land surfaces reshaped along the lines of the tame and comfortable north-European small farm and village landscape. According to the co-operative position man's proper role is to develop, cultivate and perfect nature—all nature eventually—by bringing out its potentialities, the test of perfection being primarily usefulness for human purposes; while on the stewardship view man's role, like that of a farm manager, is to make nature productive by his efforts though not by means that will deliberately degrade its resources. Although these positions both depart from the dominant position in a way which enables the incorporation of some evaluations of an environmental ethic, e.g. some of those concerning the irresponsible farmer, they do not go far enough: for in the present situation of expanding populations confined to finite natural areas, they will lead to, and enjoin, the perfecting, farming and utilizing of all natural areas. Indeed these lesser traditions lead to, what a thoroughgoing environmental ethic would reject, a principle of total use, implying that every natural area should be cultivated or otherwise used for human ends, "humanized."⁶

As the important Western traditions exclude an environmental ethic, it would appear that such an ethic, not primitive, mystical or romantic, would be new alright. The matter is not so straightforward; for the dominant ethic has been substantially qualified by the rider that one is not always entitled to do as one pleases where this physically interferes with others. Maybe some such proviso was implicit all along (despite evidence to the contrary), and it was simply assumed that doing what one pleased with natural items would not affect others (the non-interference assumption). Be this as it may, the *modified* dominant position appears, at least for many thinkers, to have supplanted the dominant position; and the modified position can undoubtedly go much further towards an environmental ethic. For example, the farmer's polluting of a community stream may be ruled immoral on the grounds that it physically interferes with others who use or would use the streams. Likewise business enterprises which destroy the

natural environment for no satisfactory returns or which cause pollution deleterious to the health of future humans, can be criticized on the sort of welfare basis (e.g. that of Barkley and Seckler) that blends with the modified position; and so on.⁷ The position may even serve to restrict the sort of family size one is entitled to have since in a finite situation excessive population levels will interfere with future people. Nonetheless neither the modified dominant position nor its Western variants, obtained by combining it with the lesser traditions, is adequate as an environmental ethic, as I shall try to show. A new ethic *is* wanted.

2

As we noticed (an) *ethic* is ambiguous, as between a specific ethical system, a *specific* ethic, and a more generic notion, a super ethic, under which specific ethics cluster.⁸ An ethical system *S* is, near enough, a propositional system (i.e. a structured set of propositions) or theory which includes (like individuals of a theory) a set of values and (like postulates of a theory) a set of general evaluative judgments concerning conduct, typically of what is obligatory, permissible and wrong, of what are rights, what is valued, and so forth. A general or lawlike proposition of a system is a principle; and certainly if systems *S*₁ and *S*₂ contain different principles, then they are different systems. It follows that any environmental ethic differs from the important traditional ethics outlined. Moreover if environmental ethics differ from Western ethical systems on some *core* principle embedded in Western systems, then these systems differ from the Western super ethic (assuming, what seems to be so, that it can be uniquely characterized)—in which case if an environmental ethic *is* needed then a new ethic is wanted. It suffices then to locate a core principle and to provide environmental counter examples to it.

It is commonly assumed that there are, what amount to, core principles of Western ethical systems, principles that will accordingly belong to the super ethic. The fairness principle inscribed in the Golden Rule provides one example. Directly relevant here, as a good stab at a core principle, is the commonly formulated liberal principle of the modified dominance position. A recent formulation runs as follows:

“The liberal philosophy of the Western world holds that one should be able to do what he wishes, providing (1) that he does not harm others and (2) that he is not likely to harm himself irreparably.”⁹

Let us call this principle *basic (human) chauvinism*—because under it humans, or people, come first and everything else a bad last—though sometimes the principle is hailed as a *freedom* principle because it gives permission to perform a wide range of actions (including actions which mess up the environment and natural things) providing they do not harm

others. In fact it tends to cunningly shift the onus of proof to others. It is worth remarking that *harming others* in the restriction is narrower than a restriction to the (usual) interests of others; it is not enough that it is in my interests, because I detest you, that you stop breathing; you are free to breathe, for the time being anyway, because it does not harm me. There remains a problem however as to exactly what counts as harm or interference. Moreover the width of the principle is so far obscure because "other" may be filled out in significantly different ways: it makes a difference to the extent, and privilege, of the chauvinism whether "other" expands to "other human"—which is too restrictive—or to "other person" or to "other sentient being"; and it makes a difference to the adequacy of the principle, and inversely to its economic applicability, to which class of others it is intended to apply, whether to future as well as to present others, whether to remote future others or only to non-discountable future others and whether to possible others. The latter would make the principle completely unworkable, and it is generally assumed that it applies at most to present and future others.

It is taken for granted in designing counter examples to basic chauvinist principles, that a semantical analysis of permissibility and obligation statements stretches out over ideal situations (which may be incomplete or even inconsistent), so that what is permissible holds in some ideal situation, what is obligatory in every ideal situation, and what is wrong is excluded in every ideal situation. But the main point to grasp for the counter examples that follow, is that ethical principles if correct are universal and are assessed over the class of ideal situations.

(i) The *last man* example. The last man (or person) surviving the collapse of the world system lays about him, eliminating, as far as he can, every living thing, animal or plant (but painlessly if you like, as at the best abattoirs). What he does is quite permissible according to basic chauvinism, but on environmental grounds what he does is wrong. Moreover one does not have to be committed to esoteric values to regard Mr. Last Man as behaving badly (the reason being perhaps that radical thinking and values have shifted in an environmental direction in advance of corresponding shifts in the formulation of fundamental evaluative principles).

(ii) The *last people* example. The last man example can be broadened to the last people example. We can assume that they know they are the last people, e.g. because they are aware that radiation effects have blocked any chance of reproduction. One considers the last people in order to rule out the possibility that what these people do harms or somehow physically interferes with later people. Otherwise one could as well consider science fiction cases where people arrive at a new planet and destroy its ecosystems, whether with good intentions such as perfecting the planet for their ends and making it more fruitful or, forgetting the lesser traditions, just for the hell of it.

Let us assume that the last people are very numerous. They humanely exterminate every wild animal and they eliminate the fish of the seas, they put all arable land under intensive cultivation, and all remaining forests disappear in favor of quarries or plantations, and so on. They may give various familiar reasons for this, e.g. they believe it is the way to salvation or to perfection, or they are simply satisfying reasonable needs, or even that it is needed to keep the last people employed or occupied so that they do not worry too much about their impending extinction. On an environmental ethic the last people have behaved badly; they have simplified and largely destroyed all the natural ecosystems, and with their demise the world will soon be an ugly and largely wrecked place. But this conduct may conform with the basic chauvinist principle, and as well with the principles enjoined by the lesser traditions. Indeed the main point of elaborating this example is because, as the last man example reveals, basic chauvinism may conflict with stewardship or co-operation principles. The conflict may be removed it seems by conjoining a further proviso to the basic principle, the effect (3) that he does not willfully destroy natural resources. But as the last people do not destroy resources willfully, but perhaps "for the best of reasons," the variant is still environmentally inadequate.

(iii) The *great entrepreneur* example. The last man example can be adjusted so as to not fall foul of clause (3). The last man is an industrialist; he runs a giant complex of automated factories and farms which he proceeds to extend. He produces automobiles among other things, from renewable and recyclable resources of course, only he dumps and recycles these shortly after manufacture and sale to a dummy buyer instead of putting them on the road for a short time as we do. Of course he has the best of reasons for his activity, e.g. he is increasing gross world product, or he is improving output to fulfill some plan, and he will be increasing his own and general welfare since he much prefers increased output and productivity. The entrepreneur's behavior is on the Western ethic quite permissible; indeed his conduct is commonly thought to be quite fine and may even meet Pareto optimality requirements given prevailing notions of being "better off."

Just as we can extend the last man example to a class of last people, so we can extend this example to the *industrial society* example: the society looks rather like ours.

(iv) The *vanishing species* example. Consider the blue whale, a mixed good on the economic picture. The blue whale is on the verge of extinction because of his qualities as a private good, as a source of valuable oil and meat. The catching and marketing of blue whales does not harm the whalers; it does not harm or physically interfere with others in any good sense, though it may upset them and they may be prepared to compensate the whalers if they desist; nor need whale hunting be willful destruction. (Slightly different examples which eliminate the hunting aspect of the blue

whale example are provided by cases where a species is eliminated or threatened through destruction of its habitat by man's activity or the activities of animals he has introduced, e.g. many plains-dwelling Australian marsupials and the Arabian oryx.) The behavior of the whalers in eliminating this magnificent species of whale is accordingly quite permissible—at least according to basic chauvinism. But on an environmental ethic it is not. However, the free-market mechanism will not cease allocating whales to commercial uses, as a satisfactory environmental economics would; instead the market model will grind inexorably along the private demand curve until the blue whale population is no longer viable—if that point has not already been passed.¹⁰

In sum, the class of permissible actions that rebound on the environment is more narrowly circumscribed on an environmental ethic than it is in the Western super ethic. But aren't environmentalists going too far in claiming that these people, those of the examples and respected industrialists, fishermen and farmers are behaving, when engaging in environmentally degrading activities of the sort described, in a morally impermissible way? No, what these people do is to a greater or lesser extent evil, and hence in serious cases morally impermissible. For example, insofar as the killing or forced displacement of primitive peoples who stand in the way of an industrial development is morally indefensible and impermissible, so also is the slaughter of the last remaining blue whales for private profit. But how to reformulate basic chauvinism as a satisfactory freedom principle is a more difficult matter. A tentative, but none too adequate beginning might be made by extending (2) to include harm to or interference with others who would be so affected by the action in question were they placed in the environment and (3) to exclude specicide. It may be preferable, in view of the way the freedom principle sets the onus of proof, simply to scrap it altogether, and instead to specify classes of rights and permissible conduct, as in a bill of rights.

3

A radical change in a theory sometimes forces changes in the meta-theory; e.g. a logic which rejects the Reference Theory in a thoroughgoing way requires a modification of the usual meta-theory which also accepts the Reference Theory and indeed which is tailored to cater only for logics which do conform. A somewhat similar phenomenon seems to occur in the case of a meta-ethic adequate for an environmental ethic. Quite apart from introducing several environmentally important notions, such as *conservation*, *pollution*, *growth* and *preservation*, for meta-ethical analysis, an environmental ethic compels re-examination and modified analyses of such characteristic actions as *natural right*, *ground of right*, and of the

Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic? 19

relations of obligation and permissibility to rights; it may well require re-assessment of traditional analyses of such notions as *value* and *right*, especially where these are based on chauvinist assumptions; and it forces the rejection of many of the more prominent meta-ethical positions. These points are illustrated by a very brief examination of accounts of *natural right* and then by a sketch of the species bias of some major positions.¹¹

Hart accepts, subject to defeating conditions which are here irrelevant, the classical doctrine of natural rights according to which, among other things, "any adult human. . .capable of choice is at liberty to do (i.e. is under no obligation to abstain from) any action which is not one coercing or restraining or designed to injure other persons."¹² But this sufficient condition for a human natural right depends on accepting the very human chauvinist principle an environmental ethic rejects, since if a person has a natural right he has a right; so too the *definition* of a natural right adopted by classical theorists and accepted with minor qualifications by Hart presupposes the same defective principle. Accordingly an environmental ethic would have to amend the classical notion of a natural right, a far from straightforward matter now that human rights with respect to animals and the natural environment are, like those with respect to slaves not all that long ago, undergoing major re-evaluation.

An environmental ethic does not commit one to the view that natural objects such as trees have rights (though such a view is occasionally held, e.g. by pantheists. But pantheism is false since artefacts are not alive). For moral prohibitions forbidding certain actions with respect to an object do not award that object a correlative right. That it would be wrong to mutilate a given tree or piece of property does not entail that the tree or piece of property has a correlative right not to be mutilated (without seriously stretching the notion of a right). Environmental views can stick with mainstream theses according to which rights are coupled with corresponding responsibilities and so with bearing obligations, and with corresponding interests and concern; i.e. at least, whatever has a right also has responsibilities and therefore obligations, and whatever has a right has interests. Thus although any person may have a right by no means every living thing can (significantly) have rights, and arguably most sentient objects other than persons cannot have rights. But persons can relate morally, through obligations, prohibitions and so forth, to practically anything at all.

The species bias of certain ethical and economic positions which aim to make principles of conduct or reasonable economic behavior calculable is easily brought out. These positions typically employ a single criterion *p*, such as preference or happiness, as a *summum bonum*; characteristically each individual of some *base* class, almost always humans, but perhaps including future humans, is supposed to have an ordinal *p* ranking of the states in question (e.g. of affairs, of the economy); then some principle is

supplied to determine a collective p ranking of these states in terms of individual p rankings, and what is best or ought to be done is determined either directly, as in act-utilitarianism under the Greatest Happiness principle, or indirectly, as in rule-utilitarianism, in terms of some optimization principle applied to the collective ranking. The species bias is transparent from the selection of the base class. And even if the base class is extended to embrace persons, or even some animals (at the cost, like that of including remotely future humans, of losing testability), the positions are open to familiar criticism, namely that the whole of the base class may be prejudiced in a way which leads to unjust principles. For example if every member of the base class detests dingoes, on the basis of mistaken data as to dingoes' behavior, then by the Pareto ranking test the collective ranking will rank states where dingoes are exterminated very highly, from which it will generally be concluded that dingoes ought to be exterminated (the evaluation of most Australian farmers anyway). Likewise it would just be a happy accident, it seems, if collective demand (horizontally summed from individual demand) for a state of the economy with blue whales as a mixed good, were to succeed in outweighing private whaling demands; for if no one in the base class happened to know that blue whales exist or cared a jot that they do then "rational" economic decision-making would do nothing to prevent their extinction. Whether the blue whale survives should not have to depend on what humans know or what they see on television. Human interests and preferences are far too parochial to provide a satisfactory basis for deciding on what is environmentally desirable.

These ethical and economic theories are not alone in their species chauvinism; much the same applies to most going meta-ethical theories which, unlike intuitionistic theories, try to offer some rationale for their basic principles. For instance, on social contract positions obligations are a matter of mutual agreements between individuals of the base class; on a social justice picture rights and obligations spring from the application of symmetrical fairness principles to members of the base class, usually a rather special class of persons, while on a Kantian position which has some vague obligations somehow arise from respect for members of the base class persons. In each case if members of the base class happen to be ill-disposed to items outside the base class then that is too bad for them: that is (rough) justice.

NOTES

1. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), p. 238.
2. A view occasionally tempered by the idea that trees house spirits.
3. Leopold, *Sand County*, p. 245.

Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic? 21

4. To the consternation no doubt of Quineans. But the fact is that we can talk perfectly well about inchoate and fragmentary systems the identity of which may be indeterminate.
5. John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (New York: Scribner's, 1974).
6. If 'use' is extended, somewhat illicitly, to include use for preservation, this total use principle is rendered innocuous at least as regards its actual effects. Note that the total use principle is tied to the resource view of nature.
7. P. W. Barkley and D. W. Seckler, *Economic Growth and Environmental Decay: The Solution Becomes the Problem* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972).
8. A *meta-ethic* is, as usual, a theory about ethics, super ethics, their features and fundamental notions.
9. Barkley and Seckler, *Economic Growth and Environmental Decay*, p. 58. A related principle is that (modified) free enterprise can operate within similar limits.
10. For the tragedy of the commons type reasons well explained in Barkley and Seckler, *Economic Growth and Environmental Decay*.
11. Some of these points are developed by those protesting about human maltreatment of animals; see especially the essays collected in S. and R. Godlovitch and J. Harris, eds., *Animals, Men and Morals: An Enquiry into the Maltreatment of Non-humans* (New York: Grove Press, 1971).
12. H. L. A. Hart, "Are There any Natural Rights?" reprinted in A. Quinton, ed., *Political Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[2]

Is There an Ecological Ethic?

Holmes Rolston III

Colorado State University

*The Ecological Conscience*¹ is the arresting title of a representative environmental anthology. The puzzlement lies neither in the noun nor in the by now familiar modifier, but in their operation on each other. We are comfortable with a Christian or humanist ethic, but the moral noun does not regularly take a scientific adjective: a biological conscience, a geological conscience. In a celebrated survey, *The Subversive Science*,² where ecology reaches into our ultimate commitments, Paul Sears entitles an essay "The Steady State: Physical Law and Moral Choice." To see how odd, ethically and scientifically, is the conjunction, replace homeostasis with gravity or entropy.

The sense of anomaly will dissipate, though moral urgency may remain, if an environmental ethic proves to be only an ethic—utilitarian, hedonist, or whatever—*about* the environment, brought to it, informed concerning it, but not in principle ecologically formed or reformed. This would be like medical ethics, which is applied to but not derived from medical science. But we are sometimes promised more, a derivation in which the newest bioscience shapes (not to say, subverts) the ethic, a resurgent naturalistic ethics. "We must learn that nature includes an intrinsic value system," writes Ian McHarg.³ A *Daedalus* collection is introduced with the same conviction: Environmental science "is the building of the structure of concepts and natural laws that will enable man to understand his place in nature. Such understanding must be one basis of the moral values that guide each human generation in exercising its stewardship over the earth. For this purpose ecology—the science of interactions among living things and their environments—is central."⁴ We shall presently inquire into the claim that an

1. Robert Disch, ed., *The Ecological Conscience: Values for Survival* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970).

2. Paul Shepard and Daniel McKinley, eds., *The Subversive Science* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969).

3. Ian L. McHarg, "Values, Process, and Form," in Disch, p. 21.

4. Roger Revelle and Hans H. Landsberg, eds., *America's Changing Environment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. xxii.

94 *Ethics*

ecological ultimacy lies in "The Balance of Nature: A Ground for Values." Just what sort of traffic is there here between science and morality?

The boundary between science and ethics is precise if we accept a pair of current (though not unargued) philosophical categories: the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive law. The former, in the indicative, marks the realm of science and history. The latter, including always an imperative, marks the realm of ethics. The route from one to the other, if any, is perhaps the most intransigent issue in moral philosophy, and he who so moves will be accused of the naturalistic fallacy. No set of statements of fact by themselves entails any evaluative statement, except as some additional evaluative premise has been introduced. With careful analysis this evaluation will reappear, the ethics will separate out from the science. We shall press this logic on ecological ethics. Environmental science describes what is the case. An ethic prescribes what ought to be. But an environmental ethic? If our categories hold, perhaps we have a muddle. Or perhaps a paradox that yields light on the linkage between facts and values.

We find representative spokesman for ecological morality not of a single mind. But the multiple species can, we suggest, be classified in two genera, following two concepts that are offered as moral sources. (A) Prominent in, or underlying, those whom we hear first is the connection of homeostasis with morality. This issues largely in what we term an ethic that is secondarily ecological. (B) Beyond this, surpassing though not necessarily gainsaying it, is the discovery of a moral ought inherent in recognition of the holistic character of the ecosystem, issuing in an ethic that is primarily ecological.

But first, consider an analogue. When advised that we ought to obey the laws of health, we analyze the injunction. The laws of health are nonmoral and operate inescapably on us. But, circumscribed by them, we have certain options: to employ them to our health, or to neglect them ("break them") to our hurt. Antecedent to the laws of health, the moral ought reappears in some such form as, "You ought not to harm yourself." Similarly the laws of psychology, economics, history, the social sciences, and indeed all applied sciences describe what is (has been, or may be) the case; but in confrontation with human agency, they prescribe what the agent must do if he is to attain a desired end. They yield a technical ought related to an if-clause at the agent's option. So far they are nonmoral; they become moral only as a moral principle binds the agent to some end. This, in turn, is transmitted through natural law to a proximate moral ought. Let us map this as follows:

<i>Technical Ought</i> You ought not to break the laws of health	<i>Natural Law</i> for the laws of health describe the conditions of welfare	<i>Antecedent If-Option</i> if you wish not to harm yourself.
<i>Proximate Moral Ought</i> You ought not to break the laws of health	<i>Natural Law</i> for the laws of health describe the conditions of welfare	<i>Antecedent Moral Ought</i> and you ought not to harm yourself.

95 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

Allow for the moment that (in the absence of overriding considerations) prudence is a moral virtue. How far can ecological ethics transpose to an analogous format?

A

Perhaps the paramount law in ecological theory is that of homeostasis. In material, our planetary ecosystem is essentially closed, and life proceeds by recycling transformations. In energy, the system is open, with balanced solar input and output, the cycling being in energy subsystems of aggradation and degradation. Homeostasis, it should be noted, is at once an achievement and a tendency. Systems recycle, and there is energy balance; yet the systems are not static, but dynamic, as the forces that yield equilibrium are in flux, seeking equilibrium yet veering from it to bring counterforces into play. This perpetual stir, tending to and deviating from equilibrium, drives the evolutionary process.

1. How does this translate morally? Let us consider first a guarded translation. In "The Steady State: Physical Law and Moral Choice," Paul Sears writes: "Probably men will always differ as to what constitutes the good life. They need not differ as to what is necessary for the long survival of man on earth. Assuming that this is our wish, the conditions are clear enough. As living beings we must come to terms with the environment about us, learning to get along with the liberal budget at our disposal, promoting rather than disrupting those great cycles of nature—of water movement, energy flow, and material transformation that have made life itself possible. As a physical goal, we must seek to attain what I have called a steady state."⁵ The title of the article indicates that this is a moral "must." To assess this argument, begin with the following:

<i>Technical Ought</i> You ought to recycle	<i>Ecological Law</i> for the life-supporting ecosystem recycles or perishes	<i>Antecedent If-Option</i> if you wish to preserve human life.
--	---	--

When we replace the if-option by an antecedent moral ought, we convert the technical ought to a proximate moral ought. Thus the "must" in the citation is initially one of physical necessity describing our circumscription by ecological law, and subsequently it is one of moral necessity when this law is conjoined with the life-promoting ought.

<i>Proximate Moral Ought</i> You ought to recycle	<i>Ecological Law</i> for the life-supporting ecosystem recycles or perishes	<i>Antecedent Moral Ought</i> and you ought to preserve human life.
--	---	--

The antecedent ought Sears takes, fairly enough, to be common to many if not all our moral systems. Notice the sense in which we can break ecological law. Spelling the conditions of stability and instability, homeostatic laws

5. Shepard and McKinley, p. 401.

96 *Ethics*

operate on us willy-nilly, but within a necessary obedience we have options, some of which represent enlightened obedience. To break an ecological law, means then, to disregard its implications in regard to an antecedent moral ought.

Thus far ecological morality is informed about the environment, conforming to it, but is not yet an ethic in which environmental science affects principles. Antecedent to ecological input, there is a classical ethical principle, "promoting human life," which, when ecologically tutored, better understands life's circulations, whether in homeostasis, or in DDT, or strontium 90. Values do not (have to) lie in the world but may be imposed on it, as man prudentially manages the world.

2. Much attention has focused on a 1968 address, "The Tragedy of the Commons," given by Garrett Hardin to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Hardin's argument, recently expanded to book length, proposes an ecologically based "fundamental extension in morality."⁶ While complex in its ramifications and deserving of detailed analysis, the essential ethic is simple, built on the model of a village commons. Used by the villagers to graze cattle, the commons is close to its carrying capacity. Any villager who does not increase his livestock will be disadvantaged in the market. Following self-interest, each increases his herd; and the commons is destroyed. Extended to the planet, seen as a homeostatic system of finite resources the model's implication of impending tragedy is obvious. (The propriety of the extrapolation is arguable, but not at issue here.) The prescription of an ecological morality is "mutual coercion, mutually agreed on" in which we limit freedom to grow in order to stabilize the ecosystem to the mutual benefit of all.

To distill the ethics here is not difficult. We begin as before, with ecological law that yields options, which translate morally only with the addition of the life-promoting obligation.

Technical Ought
We ought to stabilize the ecosystem thru mutually imposed limited growth

Ecological Law
for the life-supporting ecosystem stabilizes at a finite carrying capacity or is destroyed

Antecedent If-Option
if we wish mutually to preserve human life.

Proximate Moral Ought
We ought to stabilize the ecosystem thru mutually imposed self-limited growth

Ecological Law
for the life-supporting ecosystem stabilizes at a finite carrying capacity or is destroyed

Antecedent Moral Ought
and we ought mutually to preserve human life.

To clarify the problem of mutual preservation, Hardin uses an essentially Hobbesian scheme. Every man is an ego set over against the community, acting in his own self-interest. But to check his neighbor's aggrandizement, he compromises and enters a social contract where, now acting in enlight-

6. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968): 1243-48.

97 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

ened self-interest; he limits his own freedom to grow in return for a limitation of the encroaching freedom of his competitors. The result is surprisingly atomistic and anthropocentric, recalling the post-Darwinian biological model, lacking significant place for the mutual interdependence and symbiotic cooperation so prominent in recent ecology. In any event, it is clear enough that Hardin's environmental ethic is only a classical ethic applied in the matrix of ecological limitations.

Typically, ecological morality generated by population pressure resolves itself into a particular case of this kind, as for instance in the analysis of Paul Ehrlich in *The Population Bomb*. This is an ethic of scarcity, but morality since its inception has been conceived in scarcity.

3. Let us pass to a more venturesome translation of homeostasis into moral prescription, that of Thomas B. Colwell, Jr. "The balance of Nature provides an objective normative model which can be utilized as the ground of human value. . . . Nor does the balance of Nature serve as the source of all our values. It is only the *ground* of whatever other values we may develop. But these other values must be consistent with it. The balance of Nature is, in other words, a kind of ultimate value. . . . It is a *natural* norm, not a product of human convention or supernatural authority. It says in effect to man: 'This much at least you must do, this much you must be responsible for. You must at least develop and utilize energy systems which recycle their products back into Nature.' . . . Human values are founded in objectively determinable ecological relations with Nature. The ends which we propose must be such as to be compatible with the ecosystems of Nature."⁷

Morality and homeostasis are clearly blended here, but it is not so clear how we relate or disentangle them. Much is embedded in the meanings of "ground of human value," "ultimate value," the mixed moral and physical "must," and the identification of a moral norm with a natural limit. Let us mark out first a purely technical ought, followed by an antecedent moral ought which may convert to a proximate moral ought.

<i>Technical Ought</i> You ought to recycle	<i>Ecological Law</i> for the value-supporting ecosystem recycles or perishes	<i>Antecedent If-Option</i> if you wish to preserve the ground of human value.
<i>Proximate Moral Ought</i> You ought to recycle	<i>Ecological Law</i> for the value-supporting ecosystem recycles or perishes	<i>Antecedent Moral Ought</i> and you ought to preserve the ground of human value.

The simplest reading of Colwell is to hold, despite his exaggerated terms, that the "ground of human value" means only the limiting condition, itself value free, within which values are to be constructed. Homeostasis is not "an ultimate value," only a precondition of the value enterprise, necessary but

7. Thomas B. Colwell, Jr., "The Balance of Nature: A Ground for Human Values," *Main Currents in Modern Thought* 26 (1969): 50.

98 *Ethics*

not sufficient for value. But then it is misleading to say that “human values have a root base in ecological relationships.” For homeostasis, like scarce resources, or the cycling seasons, or soil characteristics, or the conservation of matter-energy, is a natural given, the stage on which the value-drama is played.

If, seeking to manage my finances wisely, I ask, “How shall I spend my money?” and you counsel, “You ought to balance your budget,” the advice is sound enough, yet only preparatory to serious discussion of economic values. The balanced budget is necessary but not sufficient for value, a ground of value only in an enabling, not a fundamental sense; certainly not what we would ordinarily call an ultimate value. It is true, of course, that the means to any end can, in contexts of desperation and urgency, stand in short focus as ultimate values. Air, food, water, health, if we are deprived of them, become at once our concern. Call them ultimate values if you wish, but the ultimacy is instrumental, not intrinsic. We should think him immature whose principal goal was just to breathe, to eat, to drink, to be healthy—merely this and nothing more. We would judge a society stagnant whose ultimate goal was but to recycle. To say that the balance of nature is a ground for human values is not to draw any ethics from ecology, as may first appear, but only to recognize the necessary medium of ethical activity.

Thus far, ecological ethics reduces rather straightforwardly to the classical ethical query now advised of certain ecological boundaries. The stir is, to put it so, about the boundedness, not the morality. The ultimate science may well herald limits to growth; it challenges certain presumptions about rising standards of living, capitalism, progress, development, and so on; convictions that, though deeply entrenched parameters of human value, are issues of what is, can, or will be the case, not of what ought to be. This realization of limits, dramatically shift ethical application though it may, can hardly be said to reform our ethical roots, for the reason that its scope remains (when optimistic) a maximizing of human values or (when pessimistic) human survival. All goods are human goods, with nature an accessory. There is no endorsement of any natural rightness, only the acceptance of the natural given. It is ecological secondarily, but primarily anthropological.

B

The claim that morality is a derivative of the holistic character of the ecosystem proves more radical, for the ecological perspective penetrates not only the secondary but also the primary qualities of the ethic. It is ecological in substance, not merely in accident; it is ecological per se, not just consequentially.

Return, for instance, to Colwell. He seems to mean more than the minimal interpretation just given him. The mood is that the ecological circumscription of value is not itself amoral or premoral, neatly articulated from morality. Construct values though man may, he operates in an environmental context where he must ground his values in ecosystemic obedience. This

99 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

“must” is ecologically descriptive: certain laws in fact circumscribe him and embrace his value enterprises. And it is also morally prescriptive: given options within parameters of necessary obedience, he morally ought to promote homeostasis. But here, advancing on the preceding argument, the claim seems to be that following ecological nature is not merely a prudential means to moral and valuational ends independent of nature but is an end in itself; or, more accurately, it is within man’s relatedness to his environment that all man’s values are grounded and supported. In that construction of values, man doubtless exceeds any environmental prescription, but nevertheless his values remain environmental reciprocals. They complement a homeostatic world. His valuations, like his other perceptions and knowings, are interactionary, drawn from environmental transactions, not merely brought to it. In this environmental encounter, he finds homeostasis a key to all values—the precondition of values, if you will—but one which, for all that, informs and shapes his other values by making them relational, corporate, environmental. But we are passing over to moral endorsement of the ecosystemic character, and to a tenor of argument that others make clearer.

Perhaps the most provocative such affirmation is in a deservedly seminal essay, “The Land Ethic,” by Aldo Leopold. He concludes, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”⁸ Leopold writes in search of a morality of land use that escapes economic expediency. He too enjoins, proximately, recycling, but it is clear that his claim transcends the immediate context to teach that we morally ought to preserve the excellences of the ecosystem (or, more freely as we shall interpret him, to maximize the integrity, beauty, and stability of the ecosystem). He is seeking, as he says, to advance the ethical frontier from the merely interpersonal to the region of man in transaction with his environment.

Here the environmental perspective enters not simply at the level of the proximate ought which, environmentally informed and preceded by homocentrist moral principles, prescribes protection of the ecosystem. It acts at a higher level, as itself an antecedent ought, from which proximate oughts, such as the one earlier considered, about recycling, may be derived.

Proximate Moral Ought
You ought to recycle

Ecological Law
for recycling preserves the
ecosystem

Antecedent Moral Ought
and you ought to preserve
the integrity of the ecosys-
tem.

Note how the antecedent parallels upper-level axioms in other systems (e.g., “You ought to maximize human good,” or “You ought not to harm yourself or others,” or “Love your neighbor as yourself”). Earlier, homeostatic connectedness did not really alter the moral focus; but here, in a shift of paradigms, the values hitherto reserved for man are reallocated to man in the environment.

8. Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 201–26.

100 *Ethics*

Doubtless even Leopold's antecedent ought depends on a yet prior ought that one promote beauty and integrity, wherever he finds it. But this, like the injunction that one ought to promote the good, or that one ought to keep his promises, is so high level as to be, if not definitional or analytic, so general as to be virtually unarguable and therefore without any real theoretical content. Substantive values emerge only as something empirical is specified as the locus of value. In Leopold's case we have a feedback from ecological science which, prior to any effect on proximate moral oughts, informs the antecedent ought. There is a valuational element intrinsically related to the concepts utilized in ecological description. That is, the character of what is right in some basic sense, not just in application, is stated postecologically. Doubtless too, the natural course we choose to preserve is filtered through our concepts of beauty, stability, and integrity, concepts whose origins are not wholly clear and which are perhaps nonnatural. But, perspectival though this invariably is, what counts as beauty and integrity is not just brought to and imposed on the ecosystem but is discovered there. Let us map this as follows:

<i>Proximate Moral Ought</i>	<i>Ecological Law</i>	<i>Antecedent Moral Ought</i>	<i>Ecosystemic Evaluation</i>
You ought to recycle	for recycling preserves the integral ecosystem	and you ought to preserve the integrity of the ecosystem	for the integral ecosystem has value.

Our antecedent ought is not eco-free. Though preceding ecological law in the sense that, given this ought, one can transmit it via certain ecological laws to arrive at proximate oughts, it is itself a result of an ecosystemic appraisal.

This evaluation is not scientific description; hence not ecology per se, but metaecology. No amount of research can verify that the right is the optimum biotic community. Yet ecological description generates this evaluation of nature, endorsing the systemic rightness. The transition from "is" to "good" and thence to "ought" occurs here; we leave science to enter the domain of evaluation, from which an ethic follows. The injunction to recycle is technical, made under circumscription by ecological necessity and made moral only by the presence of an antecedent. The injunction to maximize the ecosystemic excellence is also ecologically derived but is an evaluative transition which is not made under necessity.

Our account initially suggests that ecological description is logically (if not chronologically) prior to the ecosystemic evaluation, the former generating the latter. But the connection of description with evaluation is more complex, for the description and evaluation to some extent arise together, and it is often difficult to say which is prior and which is subordinate. Ecological description finds unity, harmony, interdependence, stability, etc., and these are valuationally endorsed, yet they are found, to some extent, because we search with a disposition to value order, harmony, stability,

101 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

unity. Still, the ecological description does not merely confirm these values, it informs them; and we find that the character, the empirical content, of order, harmony, stability is drawn from, no less than brought to, nature. In post-Darwinian nature, for instance, we looked for these values in vain, while with ecological description we now find them; yet the earlier data are not denied, only redescribed or set in a larger ecological context, and somewhere enroute our notions of harmony, stability, etc., have shifted too and we see beauty now where we could not see it before. What is ethically puzzling, and exciting, in the marriage and mutual transformation of ecological description and evaluation is that here an "ought" is not so much *derived* from an "is" as discovered simultaneously with it. As we progress from descriptions of fauna and flora, of cycles and pyramids, of stability and dynamism, on to intricacy, planetary opulence and interdependence, to unity and harmony with oppositions in counterpoint and synthesis, arriving at length at beauty and goodness, it is difficult to say where the natural facts leave off and where the natural values appear. For some observers at least, the sharp is/ought dichotomy is gone; the values seem to be there as soon as the facts are fully in, and both alike are properties of the system.

While it is frequently held that the basic criterion of the obligatory is the nonmoral value that is produced or sustained, there is novelty in what is taken as the nonmoral good—the ecosystem. Our ethical heritage largely attaches values and rights to persons, and if nonpersonal realms enter, they enter only as tributary to the personal. What is proposed here is a broadening of value, so that nature will cease to be merely "property" and become a commonwealth. The logic by which goodness is discovered or appreciated is notoriously evasive, and we can only reach it suggestively. "Ethics cannot be put into words," said Wittgenstein, such things "*make themselves manifest*."⁹ We have a parallel, retrospectively, in the checkered advance of the ethical frontier recognizing intrinsic goodness, and accompanying rights, outside the self. If we now universalize "person," consider how slowly the circle has been enlarged fully to include aliens, strangers, infants, children, Negroes, Jews, slaves, women, Indians, prisoners, the elderly, the insane, the deformed, and even now we ponder the status of fetuses. Ecological ethics queries whether we ought again to universalize, recognizing the intrinsic value of every ecobiotic component.

Are there, first, existing ethical sentiments that are subecological, that is, which anticipate the ecological conscience, and on which we might build? Second, is the ecological evaluation authentic, or perhaps only a remodeled traditional humanist ethic? Lastly, what are the implications of maximizing the ecosystem, and what concept of nature warrants such evaluation?

1. Presumably the evaluation of a biotic community will rest partly on the worth of its elements, if not independently, then in matrix. We have a long-standing, if (in the West) rather philosophically neglected, tradition that

9. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 6:421, 522.

102 *Ethics*

grants some moral ought to the prevention of needless animal suffering: "A righteous man has regard for the life of his beasts" (Proverbs 12.10). Consider what we oddly call "humane" societies or laws against cockfighting, bear baiting, and (in our nation) bullfighting, and (in most states) steer busting. We prohibit a child's torture of a cat; we prosecute the rancher who carelessly lets horses starve. Even the hunter pursues a wounded deer. That one ought to prevent needless cruelty has no obvious ecological foundation, much less a natural one, but the initial point is that animals are so far endowed with a value that conveys something like rights, or at least obligates us.

More revelatory is the increasingly common claim that one ought not to destroy life, or species, needlessly, regardless of suffering. We prevent the wanton slaughter of eagles, whether they suffer or not. Even the zealous varmint hunter seems to need the rationalization that crows rob the cornfield. He must malign the coyote and wolf to slay them enthusiastically. He cannot kill just for fun. We abhor the oilspills that devastate birdlife. The Sierra Club defends the preservation of grizzlies or whooping cranes on many counts as means to larger ends—as useful components of the ecosystem, for scientific study, or for our children's enjoyment. (We shall return to the integrated character of such argument.) But sufficiently pressed, the defense is that one ought not destroy a life form of beauty. Since ecosystems regularly eliminate species, this may be a nonecological ought. Yet it is not clearly so, for part of a species' evaluation arises as it is seen in environmental matrix. Meanwhile, we admit they should continue to exist, "as a matter of biotic right."¹⁰

This caliber of argument can be greatly extended. A reason given for the preservation of Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the variety of rare salamanders there. Certain butterflies occur rarely in isolated hummocks in the African grasslands. Formerly, unscrupulous collectors would collect a few hundred then burn out the hummock to destroy the species, and thereby drive up the price of their collections. I find myself persuaded that they morally ought not do this. Nor will the reason resolve into the evil of greed, but it remains the needless destruction of even a butterfly species. At scattered occurrences of rare ferns in Tennessee I refused to collect, not simply to leave them for others to enjoy, but morally unwilling to imperil a species. Such species are a fortiori environmentally pressed, yet they remain, and even prosper, in selected environmental niches, and their dispatch by human whim seems of a different order from their elimination by natural selection—something like the difference between murder and death by natural causes.

This respect enlarges to the landscape. We preserve certain features of natural beauty—the Grand Canyon, or Rainbow Bridge, or the Everglades. Though it seems odd to accord them "rights" (for proposals to confer rights on some new entity always sound linguistically odd), we go so far as to say

10. Leopold, p. 211.

103 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

that, judged to be places of beauty or wonder, they ought to be preserved. Is this only as a means to an end, that we and others may enjoy them? The answer is complex. At least some argue that, as with persons, they are somehow violated, even prostituted, if treated merely as means; we enjoy them very largely for what they are in themselves. To select some landscapes is not to judge the omitted ones valueless. They may be sacrificed to higher values, or perhaps selected environments are judged sufficiently representative of more abundant ones. That we do preserve any landscape indicates our discovery of value there, with its accompanying ought. Nor are such environments only the hospitable ones. We are increasingly drawn to the beauty of wilderness, desert, tundra, the arctic, and the sea. Planetary forces ever reshape landscapes, of course, and former environments are now extinct; nevertheless, we find in extant landscapes an order of beauty that we are unwilling to destroy.

2. Do we perhaps have, even in this proposed primary ecological ethic, some eco-free ought? If Leopold's preserving the ecosystem is merely ancillary to human interests, the veiled antecedent ought is still that we ought to maximize human good. Were we so to maximize the ecosystem we should have a corporate anthropological egoism, "human chauvinism," not a planetary altruism. The optimum ecosystem would be but a prudential means to human welfare, and our antecedent ought would no longer be primarily ecological, but as before, simply a familiar one, incidentally ecological in its prudence.

Even when richly appreciative of nature's values, much ecological moralizing does in fact mix the biosystemic welfare with an appeal to human interests. Reminiscent of Leopold, René Dubos suggests extending the Decalogue with an eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt strive for environmental quality." The justification may have a "resources" cast. We preserve wilderness and the maximally diverse ecosystem for reasons scientific and aesthetic. Natural museums serve as laboratories. Useless species may later be found useful. Diversity insures stability, especially if we err and our monocultures trigger environmental upset. Wild beauty adds a spiritual quality to life. "Were it only for selfish reasons, therefore, we must maintain variety and harmony in nature. . . . Wilderness is not a luxury; it is a necessity for the protection of humanized nature and for the preservation of mental health."¹¹

But the "were it only . . ." indicates that such reasons, if sufficient, are not ultimate. Deeper, nonselfish reasons respect "qualities inherent" in fauna, flora, landscape, "so as to foster their development." Haunting Western civilization is "the criminal conceit that nature is to be considered primarily as a source of raw materials and energy for human purposes," "the crude belief that man is the only value to be considered in managing the world and that the rest of nature can be thoughtlessly sacrificed to his welfare and

11. René Dubos, *A God Within* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 166-67.

104 *Ethics*

whims." While holding that man is the creature who humanizes nature, the ecological conscience is sensitive to other worth. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, it is only as man grants an intrinsic integrity to nature that he discovers his truest interests. "An enlightened anthropocentrism acknowledges that, in the long run, the world's good always coincides with man's own most meaningful good. Man can manipulate nature to his best interests only if he first loves her for her own sake."¹²

This coincidence of human and ecosystemic interests, frequent in environmental thought, is ethically confusing but fertile. To reduce ecological concern merely to human interests does not really exhaust the moral temper here, and only as we appreciate this will we see the ethical perspective significantly altered. That alteration centers in the dissolution of any firm boundary between man and the world. Ecology does not know an encapsulated ego over against his environment. Listen, for instance, to Paul Shepard: "Ecological thinking, on the other hand, requires a kind of vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self ennobled and extended, rather than threatened, as part of the landscape, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves."¹³ Man's vascular system includes arteries, veins, rivers, oceans, and air currents. Cleaning a dump is not different in kind from filling a tooth. The self metabolically, if metaphorically, interpenetrates the ecosystem. The world is my body.

This mood frustrates and ultimately invalidates the effort to understand all ecological ethics as disguised human self-interest, for now, with the self expanded into the system, their interests merge. One may, from a limited perspective, maximize the systemic good to maximize human good, but one can hardly say that the former is only a means to the latter, since they both amount to the same thing differently described. We are acquainted with egoism, *égoïsme à deux, trois, quatre*, with familial and tribal egoism. But here is an *égoïsme à la système*, as the very etymology of "ecology" witnesses: the earth is one's household. In this planetary confraternity, there is a confluence of egoism and altruism. Or should we say that egoism is transformed into ecoism? To advocate the interests of the system as a means of promoting the interests of man (in an appeal to industry and to congressmen) is to operate with a limited understanding. If we wish, for rhetorical or pragmatic reasons, we may begin with maximizing human good. But when ecologically tutored, we see that this can be redescribed as maximizing the ecosystem. Our classical ought has been transformed, stretched, coextensively with an ecosystemic ought.

To illustrate, ponder the observation that biotic-environmental complexity is integrally related to the richness of human life. That the stability and integrity of an ecosystem is a function of its variety and diversity is a

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41, 45.

13. Shepard, p. 2.

105 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

fairly well-established point; and it is frequently observed that complex life forms evolve only in complex environments. The long evolution of man, accordingly, has been possible only under the stimulation of many environments—marine, arboreal, savannah, tropical, temperate, even arctic. Even when man lives at a distance from some of these, they remain tributary to his life support. Without oceans, forests, and grasslands, human life would be imperiled. Thus man's complex life is a product of and is underlain by environmental complexity.

This complexity is not simply biological but also mental and cultural. For maximum noetic development, man requires an environmental exuberance. So Shepard eloquently introduces the "universal wisdom" of *The Subversive Science*:

Internal complexity, as the mind of a primate, is an extension of natural complexity, measured by the variety of plants and animals and the variety of nerve cells—organic extensions of each other. The exuberance of kinds as the setting in which a good mind could evolve (to deal with a complex world) was not only a past condition. Man did not arrive in the world as though disembarking from a train in the city. He continues to arrive. . . . This idea of natural complexity as a counterpart to human intricacy is central to an ecology of man. The creation of order, of which man is an example, is realized also in the number of species and habitats, an abundance of landscapes lush and poor. Even deserts and tundras increase the planetary opulence. . . . Reduction of this variegation would, by extension then, be an amputation of man. To convert all "wastes"—all deserts, estuaries, tundras, ice-fields, marshes, steppes and moors—into cultivated fields and cities would impoverish rather than enrich life esthetically as well as ecologically.¹⁴

Mountains have both physical and psychic impact. Remove eagles from the sky and we will suffer a spiritual loss. For every landscape, there is an inscape; mental and environmental horizons reciprocate.

This supports, but only by curiously transforming, the preservation of the ecosystem in human self-interest, for the "self" has been so extended as to be ecosystemically redefined. The human welfare which we find in the enriched ecosystem is no longer recognizable as that of anthropocentrism. Man judges the ecosystem as "good" or "bad" not in short anthropocentric focus, but with enlarged perspective where the integrity of other species enriches him. The moral posture here recalls more familiar (if frequently unsettled) ethical themes: that self-interest and benevolence are not necessarily incompatible, especially where one derives personal fulfillment from the welfare of others; that treating the object of ethical concern as an end in itself is uplifting; that one's own integrity is enhanced by recognition of other integrities.

3. This environmental ethic is subject both to limits and to development, and a fair appraisal ought to recognize both. As a partial ethical source, it does not displace functioning social-personal codes, but brings into the scope of ethical transaction a realm once regarded as intrinsically valueless

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

106 *Ethics*

and governed largely by expediency. The new ethical parameter is not absolute but relative to classical criteria. Such extension will amplify conflicts of value, for human goods must now coexist with environmental goods. In operational detail this will require a new casuistry. Mutually supportive though the human and the ecosystemic interests may be, conflicts between individuals and parties, the rights of the component members of the ecosystem, the gap between the real and the ideal, will provide abundant quandaries.

Further, interpreting charitably, we are not asked to idolize the whole except as it is understood as a cosmos in which the corporate vision surrounds and limits, but does not suppress the individual. The focus does not only enlarge from man to other ecosystemic members, but from individuals of whatever kind to the system. Values are sometimes personalized; here the community holds values. This is not, of course, without precedent, for we now grant values to states, nations, churches, trusts, corporations, and communities. And they hold these values because of their structure in which individuals are beneficiaries. It is similar with the ecosystem, only more so; for when we recall its diffusion of the boundary between the individual and the ecosystem, we cannot say whether value in the system or in the individual is logically prior.

Leopold and Shepard do not mean to deep freeze the present ecosystem. Despite their preservationist vocabulary, their care for the biosystemic welfare allows for "alteration, management, and use."¹⁵ We are not committed to this as the best possible ecosystem; it may well be that the role of man—at once "citizen" and "king"—is to govern what has hitherto been the partial success of the evolutionary process. Though we revere the earth, we may yet "humanize" it, a point made forcefully by René Dubos.¹⁶ This permits interference with and rearrangement of nature's spontaneous course. It enjoins domestication, for part of the natural richness is its potential in human life support. We recognize man's creativity, development, openness, and dynamism.

Species regularly enter and exit nature's theater; perhaps natural selection currently tests species for their capacity to coexist with man. Orogenic and erosional forces have produced perpetual environmental flux; man may well transform his environment. But this should complement the beauty, integrity, and stability of the planetary biosystem, not do violence to it. There ought to be some rational showing that the alteration is enriching; that values are sacrificed for greater ones. For this reason the right is not that which maintains the ecosystemic status quo, but that which preserves its beauty, stability, and integrity.

What ought to be does not invariably coincide with what is; nevertheless, here is a mood that, recalling etymology again, we can best describe as man's being "at home" in his world. He accepts, cherishes his good earth.

15. Leopold, p. 204.

16. Dubos, chap. 8.

107 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

Purely scientific descriptions of an ecosystem may warrant the term "stability," neutrally used; they facilitate the estimate of its beauty and integrity. Added, though, is a response of the ecologist to his discoveries, an evocation of altering consciousness. We see integrity and beauty we missed before, partly through new realization of fact—interdependence, environmental fitness, hydrologic cycles, population rhythms, and feedback loops—and partly through transformed concepts of what counts as beauty and integrity, for world and concept mutually transform each other.

Though the full range of that shifting concept of nature and the ecological description which underlies it are beyond our scope, we can suggest their central axis. After Darwin (through misunderstanding him, perhaps), the world of design collapsed, and nature, for all its law, seemed random, accidental, chaotic, blind, crude, an "odious scene of violence."¹⁷ Environmental science has been resurveying the post-Darwinian natural jungle and has increasingly set its conflicts within a dynamic web of life. Nature's savagery is much less wanton and clumsy than formerly supposed, and we are invited to see the ecosystem not merely in awe, but in "love, respect, and admiration."¹⁸ Ecological thinking "moves us to silent wonder and glad affirmation."¹⁹ Oppositions remain in ecological models, but in counterpoint. The system resists the very life it supports; indeed it is by resistance not less than environmental conductivity that life is stimulated. The integrity of species and individual is a function of a field where fullness lies in interlocking predation and symbiosis, construction and destruction, aggradation and degradation. The planet that Darrow characterized, in the post-Darwinian heyday, as a miserable little "wart"²⁰ in the universe, eminently unsuited to life, especially human life, is now a sheltered oasis in space. Its harmony is often strange, and it is not surprising that in our immaturity we mistook it, yet it is an intricate and delicate harmony nevertheless.

Man, an insider, is not spared environmental pressures, yet, in the full ecosystemic context, his integrity is supported by and rises from transaction with his world and therefore requires a corresponding dignity in his world partner. Of late, the world has ceased to threaten, save as we violate it. How starkly this gainsays the alienation that characterizes modern literature, seeing nature as basically rudderless, antipathetical, in need of monitoring and repair. More typically modern man, for all his technological prowess, has found himself distanced from nature, increasingly competent and decreasingly confident, at once distinguished and aggrandized, yet afloat on and adrift in an indifferent, if not a hostile universe. His world is at best a huge filling station; at worst a prison, or "nothingness." Not so for ecological man; confronting his world with deference to a community of value in which he

17. John Stuart Mill, "Nature," in *Collected Works* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 10:398. The phrase characterizes Mill's estimate of nature.

18. Leopold, p. 223.

19. Shepard, p. 10.

20. Clarence Darrow, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 417.

108 *Ethics*

shares, he is at home again. The new mood is epitomized, somewhat surprisingly, in reaction to space exploration, prompted by vivid photography of earth and by astronaut's nostalgia, generating both a new love for Spaceship Earth and a resolution to focus on reconciliation with it.

We shall surely not vindicate the natural sequence in every detail as being productive of ecosystemic health, and therefore we cannot simplify our ethic to an unreflective acceptance of what naturally is the case. We do not live in Eden, yet the trend is there, as ecological advance increasingly finds in the natural given stability, beauty, and integrity, and we are henceforth as willing to open our concepts to reformation by the world as to prejudge the natural order. The question of evolution as it governs our concept of nature is technically a separate one. We must judge the worth of the extant ecosystem independently of its origins. To do otherwise would be to slip into the genetic fallacy. A person has rights for what he is, regardless of his ancestry; and it may well be that an ignoble evolutionary process has issued in a present ecosystem in which we rightly rejoice. No one familiar with paleontology is likely to claim that the evolutionary sequence moves unflinchingly and without loss toward an optimally beautiful and stable ecosystem. Yet many ecological mechanisms are also evolutionary, and the ecological reappraisal suggests as a next stage an evolutionary redescription, in which we think again whether evolutionary history, for all its groping, struggle, mutation, natural selection, randomness, and statistical movement, does not yield direction enough to ponder that nature has been enriching the ecosystem. The fossil record is all of ruins. We survey it first with a certain horror; but then out of the ruins emerges this integral ecosystem. He who can be persuaded of this latter truth will have an even more powerful ecological ethic, for the injunction to maximize the ecosystemic excellences will be an invitation to get in gear with the way the universe is operating. Linking his right to nature's processes, he will have, at length, an authentic naturalistic ethic.

The perils of transposing from a new science to a world view, patent in the history of scientific thought, are surpassed only by the perils of omitting to do so. Granted that we yet lack a clear account of the logic by which we get our values, it seems undeniable that we shape them in significant measure in accord with our notion of the kind of universe that we live in. Science has in centuries before us upset those values by reappraising the character of the universe. One has but to name Copernicus and Newton, in addition to our observation that we have lately lived in the shadow of Darwin. The ecological revolution may be of a similar order; it is undeniably at work reilluminating the world.

Darwin, though, often proves more fertile than his interpreters. When, in *The Descent of Man*, he traces the natural history of man's noblest attribute, the moral sense, he observes that "the standard of his morality rises higher and higher." Initially each attended his self-interest. The growth of conscience has been a continual expansion of the objects of his "social instincts and sympathies," first to family and tribe; then he "regarded more and more,

109 *Is There an Ecological Ethic?*

not only the welfare, but the happiness of all his fellow-men;" then "his sympathies became more tender and widely diffused, extending to men of all races, to the imbecile, maimed, and other useless members of society, and finally to the lower animals. . . ."21 After the fauna, can we add the flora, the landscape, the seascape, the ecosystem? There would be something magnificent about an evolution of conscience that circumscribed the whole. If so, Leopold lies in the horizon of Darwin's vision. Much of the search for an ecological morality will, perhaps in necessary pragmatism, remain secondary, "conservative," where the ground is better charted, and where we mix ethics, science, and human interests under our logical control. But we judge the ethical frontier to be beyond, a primary revaluing where, in ethical creativity, conscience must evolve. The topography is largely uncharted; to cross it will require the daring, and caution, of a community of scientists and ethicists who can together map both the ecosystem and the ethical grammar appropriate for it.

Perhaps the cash value is the same whether our ethic is ecological in secondary or primary senses; yet in the latter I find appeal enough that it has my vote to be so if it can. To the one, man may be driven while he still fears the world that surrounds him. To the other, he can only be drawn in love.

21. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, new ed. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1895), pp. 124-25.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[3]

Anthropocentrism, Atomism, and Environmental Ethics

Donald Scherer*

By attempting to divorce attributions of value from judgments of the interest of the attributor, developing the concept of a locus of value, exploring the interconnections between the goods of individuals and the goods of populations and species, and suggesting the reasonableness of the attributions of rights to certain sorts of individuals, I try to indicate the degree to which an environmental ethic can be atomistic without being anthropocentric.

I conceive this paper as a part of an ongoing discussion. The question whether there is an environmental ethic has been understood, at least since Rolston's crystalizing article,¹ as the question of whether an environmental ethic is an ethic whose fundamental principles are framed by environmental considerations rather than simply an ethic about the environment whose fundamental principles are the usual principles of Western ethics. In arguing for an environmental ethic in the more fundamental sense, Rolston follows Leopold to suggest an ethic which places value in the functioning of the ecosystem. Following Rolston, Callicott in his recent article "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair"² insists that an environmental ethic is one in which the most fundamental value is that which conduces to the maintenance and vitality of the ecosystem.

Callicott's ethic is holistic in that a species has value because it occupies an important (functional, stabilizing) niche in an ecosystem, and a population of that species has value (I infer) because it has the appropriate demographic characteristics required for the population to perform the ecosystematic functions of the species. Callicott is clear that in this light abortion and infanticide, among various other practices, are acceptable ways to keep the level of any population (including a human population) appropriate to the maintenance of the ecosystem.³ Human beings, thus, have no special prerogative in this system of ethics: Callicott has clearly enunciated an ethic which is not speciest: it is ecosystematic rather than anthropocentric.

* Department of Philosophy, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43402. Scherer is co-editor of *Values and Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978). He is now editing a volume on environmental ethics which will soon be published by Prentice-Hall.

¹ Holmes Rolston, III, "Is There an Environmental Ethic?" *Ethics* 85 (1975): 93-109.

² J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 311-38.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 326-34.

At the same time Callicott has enunciated an ethic which is holistic, rather than atomistic. From within the Western liberal democratic tradition one might be genuinely concerned about the status of human (individual) rights within Callicott's ethic. Clearly, on Callicott's view, abortion, infanticide, nonvoluntary euthanasia, war, and other means for the elimination of the less fit may be unobjectionable because they are ecosystematically unobjectionable. At least, if this is not the position Callicott wishes to hold, there seems to be nothing in the ethic he explicates to prevent such implications or interpretations of his holism.

Is, then, the price of a nonanthropocentric ethic an ethic which recognizes no fundamental notion of individual rights? Is the only nonanthropocentric conception of ethics a conception which moves us away from the individual as the locus of value to the ecosystem and the populations which fill its niches? Must the civilized development of individual rights, along with the sensitivities which support it, be recognized as simply an outgrowth of the cancer of anthropocentrism?

I am not sure I know the answers to the questions I raise, but I should like to go some distance toward providing an answer. My goal is to provide a sketch of an ethic which is at once nonanthropocentric and yet less holistic than Callicott's. If this conception can be presented, then the discussion about the acceptability of this conception as a conception of environmental ethics and the advantages and disadvantages of this conception compared to Callicott's holistic conception can be discussed at another time.

I do not choose to quarrel with Callicott's view that there can be an ethic only if there are evaluators, beings who attribute value, but the attribution of value is clearly quite independent of judgments both of one's interest and of the interest of any of those regarded as one's kind (German-Swiss Americans, males, whites, first worlders, human beings, sentient beings, etc.). In order to keep this clear, let us confine our discussion to the existence of a planet of which earthlings are totally ignorant and with which earthlings shall never, by hypothesis, have any contact, direct or indirect. Without any contact, no advantage shall accrue to any earthling from anything which might happen on the imagined planet. No earthling has any interest, then, in what happens on the planet and, *a fortiori*, no evaluation a human being might make about anything concerning the planet would reflect any human being's interest in what happened on the planet.

In the first of successive imaginings of this planet, let us name it "Lifeless." What happens on the planet can be exhaustively described in geological, meteorological, and solar terms. Many earthquakes occur in a certain region of the planet. There are only small variations in the temperature ranges between the poles and the equator. The sun provides the limited heat of a white dwarf, for example. If we confine our assertions to ones which have no implications that life might exist on the planet, I submit we shall have no

basis in our geological, meteorological, or solar assertions upon which to justify an assertion that anything happening on the planet is of any value whatever.

Indeed, so long as the planet remains lifeless, it might seem that no sense will accrue to evaluative judgments. After all, would there be any sense in saying that the sun is not very good for heating up the rock? Or that the wind is very good at eroding the mountainside? It seems that if such assertions about Lifeless mean anything, they mean something entirely reducible to efficiency or effectiveness. The sun takes thus and so long to heat the rock 10°C. The slope of the mountainside becomes seven degrees shallower over seventy years. The assertions seem to carry no additional meaning because there is no living thing for whom the heating of the rocks or the eroding of the mountainside is of (positive or negative) value.

I am tempted to conclude that statements of value can only have a meaning capable of reductivist translation on Lifeless, a conclusion which I believe is supported by the foregoing considerations. This conclusion, however, seems to me a bit sweeping. Without any life, the planet may still be one on which the evolution of life is not impossible ("Modified Lifeless"). For example, conditions on the planet may be conducive to the development of life. If so, it is not too much to assert, from a disinterested point of view, that the conditions on the planet are *good for* the development of life.

Clearly, some may be inclined to reduce this assertion to the ground provided for it. That is, to say that conditions on the planet are good for the development of life may seem to mean no more than that the conditions conduce to or make probable the development of life on the planet. While I am inclined to agree that the evaluative statement implies the descriptive statement, yet I think the suggestion of the equivalence of these statements is misguided. I should not wish to maintain the equivalence because the evaluation can be read as a statement from the point of view of the life which might come to exist on the planet. From that perspective there is the good of the potential life. To be sure, "the good of the potential life" is an expression of vastly indefinite meaning, indefinite because of the indefiniteness of the kind of life to which the expression refers. The good of a tulip, the good of an octopus, and the good of an amoeba are at least referentially very different. But however different these goods may be and however indefinite the expression "the good of the potential life" may be, the fact remains that in introducing the perspective of a living thing, even a potential living thing, we introduce a perspective from which geological, meteorological, and solar conditions have value. Beyond its descriptive implications, "these conditions are good for the development of life" shows an awareness and an acceptance of the (potential) existence of a locus of value. I conclude then that even in referring to a lifeless planet it does make nonreductivist sense to speak of value relative to the life which may develop on the planet.

Let us now rename our imaginary planet "Flora," in accordance with the new assumption that a certain sort of life form does exist on it. Suppose that there are entities on Flora which ingest substances, excrete other substances, grow, reproduce, and then after some time perish, that is, permanently cease all of the above functions. (One might analogize these entities to plants, though I do not postulate tropisms for these entities.) If we additionally suppose that geological, meteorological, solar, and developmental conditions on Flora are as they were on Modified Lifeless, we may conclude that all of the possibilities of evaluative claims on Modified Lifeless remain in place on Flora. The entities found on Flora but not on Modified Lifeless, however, create new possibilities for disinterested evaluations. Geological, meteorological, and solar conditions are now either conducive or unconducive to the continued functioning of individual flora, of populations of species of flora, of species of flora themselves, and of flora, that is, of life in general on Flora. Similarly, the functioning of individual flora, of populations, and of species of flora is conducive or unconducive to the continued functioning of other individual flora, populations or kinds of flora, and of flora in general. *De facto* conflicts and coordinations of living things occur for the first time, carrying implications of value for individuals, populations, and species.

As with reference to Modified Lifeless, so with reference to Flora, it is difficult to understand these statements about what conduces to what simply as causal claims, that is, reductively, inasmuch as individuals, populations, and kinds of flora, along with flora in general, are reasonably understood as loci of value.

Yet it may be thought that something queerly anthropocentric is imported with the notion of a locus of value. What is a "locus of value" but a fancy way of speaking which assumes a conscious agent striving for its own good? Rather than an agent, flora are *organisms* in the sense that a certain interdependent organization of functions is necessary for the continued functioning of each floral organism. Independent of agency, much less consciousness, an individual floral organism occupies a space (locus) at which an interdependent functioning occurs. As soon as an individual or a population is sufficiently complex that a coordination of its functions is required for the continued functioning of the unit, a locus of value exists in that coordinated, interdependent functioning.

Let us now rename our imaginary planet "Fauna," in accordance with another new assumption about the kind of life forms it supports. Whereas the individuals on Flora were defined without any capacities to move in place, to move from place to place, to sense conditions beyond the spatial limits of their organisms, or to respond differentially to those sensed conditions, let us imagine that Fauna has on it individuals with those four capacities as well as each of the capacities previously ascribed to creatures on Flora. (The creatures of Fauna are in many ways comparable to animals on Earth, although it should be noted that I have not defined these creatures as necessarily heterotrophic.)

The two capacities for motion and the capacities for awareness and response create powers which expand the capacity of the fauna to perform the functions they share with Flora's inhabitants. The creatures of Fauna have increased control over how they live and how they perform their specific functions. For instance, the new powers create the potential for individuals to move and respond so as to magnify or diminish the conflicts and coordinations we noted might exist on Flora.

Interestingly, these powers seem to shift the locus of value toward individuals. Consider that on Flora no "behaving" existed. Thus, all talk about value was talk about interdependent functioning. This might be the functioning of parts of the organism, the functioning of organisms within a population, the functioning of organisms or populations within a species, or the functioning of individuals, populations, or species within the maintenance of an ecosystem viable for flora. Whatever, all talk about value was talk about interdependent functioning. The capacities for motion and for information processing (modified responses in the light of received sensory stimuli) give new sense to the concept of a locus of value as applied to individuals. (But since it is only individuals who have these new capacities, it is only they to whom this expanded concept of a locus of value applies.)

To overemphasize this point let us assume that an agent is simply an individual which is capable of differential responses to its environment *and* which normally responds so as to conduce to its functioning and its continued functioning. Agency is thus defined in terms of self-interest, and the conception of a locus of value is expanded by adding the concept of self-interest to the previous floral concept. To correct the overemphasis, let us note that the addition of faunal powers is not univocally tied, at least conceptually, to self-interest, the above notwithstanding, for nothing in the foregoing ties the powers of selective response to sensation and motion to a motivation for *self-aggrandizement* or even *self-preservation*. It is quite possible, the above definition of agency to the contrary, that fauna will be motivated by some goal for family, for the population, for the species, or for fauna in general. Still, what remains of the claim that the addition of the faunal powers seems to shift the locus of value toward individuals is this: consistency in the behavior of individual fauna, whether that behavior be self-interestedly or altruistically motivated, provides sense and grounding for the claim that the individuals are valuers, that is, that their behavior manifests the placement of value. Whatever may be the final word about what is good, the existence of value placers, that is, individual fauna with coherent behavior patterns, defines an enlarged perspective from which disinterested earthling observers of Fauna can attribute value.

Let us now consider "Modified Fauna." Having previously assumed the existence of the faunal powers, let us now assume both that faunal powers require periods of development and that there is no clear, fixed upper limit to

the development of the faunal powers. With these new assumptions come new possibilities of evaluative judgments. Certain environments *conduce* to the sharpening of these powers. Certain environments are *safe* for fauna while these powers are developing. The development of certain combinations of powers is *self-reinforcing*, while the development of other combinations is *self-defeating*. Individual specialization in the development of various combinations of powers may *fortify* the population or the species. In a word, a host of goods instrumental to the functioning of individuals, populations, and species occur because development is a reality.

These goods, however, are not properly conceived as entirely instrumental. Once it is postulated that there is no clear upper limit on the development and combinations of these powers, the distinction between a difference of degree and a difference of kind is blurred. Evolutionary processes intensify this blurring. The result may be that the development of powers to a hitherto unknown degree may change what has constituted the interdependent functioning of the individual, the population, or the species. In such cases what began as an instrumental good becomes a power for transforming the character of the good of the individual, the population, or the species.

Before proceeding, let us attempt to summarize. Environmental conditions and organisms' functioning, behaviors, and developments may conduce to the flourishing or the perishing of individuals, populations, species, or life in general. Each of these is a basis for an attribution of value, even by a disinterested observer.

Proceeding now, let us rename our imaginary planet once more. So far we have said nothing to indicate the existence of any species which is both adaptable to many environments and adapts to those environments in large part by adapting the environments to the preferred living conditions of the species. Imagining such a species, let us rename our planet "Manipulation." Naturally the manipulation of environments is going to involve making some environments less suitable as habitats for some nonmanipulators. Thus, these manipulations may be both good for the manipulators and bad for certain nonmanipulators. The existence of manipulators significantly intensifies the probability of interspecies conflicts.

Thus, the lot of manipulators is from the outset a precarious one. (1) If some nonmanipulators are threatened by the manipulators or the impact of the manipulators on the nonmanipulators' environment(s), the nonmanipulators may use whatever power they have at their disposal to subdue the manipulators or to cause them to abandon their manipulation of those environments. On the other hand, if the manipulators are able to enforce their manipulations, they *ipso facto* become the dominant species in the environment. (2) Moreover, when the manipulators change an environment making it in some way more favorable to them, they may be making it, in other ways or at later times, less favorable to them. Consequently, another complexity of evaluation is intro-

duced and a problem of ignorance emerges to cloud the truth of certain evaluations.

A further evaluative complexity introduced by manipulative species is that the same situation, circumstances, etc., may be threatening to the species or to individuals of the species, while, if the environment were suitably transformed, the otherwise same situation might be not only neutralized but made conducive to the species' development. Thus, relative to one future, perhaps involving certain manipulations, a given situation may be bad, while, relative to another future, involving certain other manipulations, that same situation may be very good. Accordingly, manipulative capacities relativize a situation's value to alternative futures and, as well, to the alternative values that those futures emphasize.

A tool-making manipulator intensifies the relativization of values to the extent that a tool makes new manipulations possible. Tool making also extends the argument that if there is no upper limit on the development of capacities, then the distinction between what the species is, what its functioning is, and what it might become is blurred. A particular environment or a particular substance might be "useless" without a particular manipulative capacity while being a "valuable resource" once the capacity is developed, a fact not lost on earthly economists.

Let us now consider "Modified Fauna-Manipulation." The modification I have in mind is to postulate that some fauna or some manipulators are self-aware creatures. (A logical point is involved in this conception: the relationship between self-awareness and manipulation is contingent.) In calling the creatures self-aware I mean that each is aware of self and other members of the species as "developing to flourish," without, or through, manipulation. The individuals are aware of themselves as capable of flourishing and vulnerable to perishing. Each enjoys flourishing and developing to flourish. Moreover, each realizes how conflicts can not only prevent or diminish the development or flourishing of others but also mar the enjoyment of that development or flourishing.

Let us imagine that such a species develops and enforces a code of behaviors for ensuring that the development or flourishing of one individual of any species only minimally conflicts with the development or flourishing of other individuals, populations, or species. The sensitivities that lead to the development of the code and the code itself ground new possibilities of judgments of new kinds of goods, namely (a) self-determination, which is itself the individual's expression of itself as a locus of value, and (b) a social order judged as good or bad insofar as it conduces to the expression of (self-respecting and other-respecting) valuing in the behavior and self-awareness of individuals.

If such a social order is good, it will include an understanding of permissions and of prohibitions of various kinds of behaviors of individuals. If each individual is at liberty to act in certain ways, others are prohibited from prohibiting

exercise of this liberty. In a word, then, the new kind of good involved in a good social order among such creatures is a social order which establishes and maintains a system of *prima facie* individual rights.

Here I conclude my thought experiment and turn to assessing its significance. The thought experiment has manifested non-self-interested forms of human valuing. We had discovered interdependent functioning, behaving, development, manipulative capacities, self-awareness of potentials and vulnerabilities, self-determination, conflicts and coordinations of any and all of the above, and codes of behavior designed to promote flourishing as sources of value. It remains now to say what this has to do with ethics and with environmental ethics.

By an ethic I understand a statement of the most general principles to which conduct should adhere, and I assume Callicott's conclusions about the sort of creature to whom an ethic applies.⁴ The sort of ethic I envision is, in a very fundamental sense, teleological. The principles of the ethic are very abstract hypotheses for minimizing conflicts and maximizing coordinations to enhance the existence of sources of positive value. Because of their hypothetical character, the principles, in theory, are subject to revision. Because of their abstractness, most of the revision is absorbed by more concrete prescriptions derived from those principles.

But is this ethic in any special way environmental? I think so for several reasons. First, the interdependent functioning of individuals, populations, and species, a value discovered on Flora, is in no way mitigated or denied by the other values subsequently discovered. Indeed, the entire set of subsequent values is derivative from, because they are physically dependent upon, a viable ecosystem. Second, the developments on Fauna and on Manipulation create possibilities of fits between living things and their environments which do not exist on Flora. In part the values discovered on Fauna and Manipulation have their source in these creature-environment fits. Third, the nonanthropomorphic, disinterested character of the discovery of the values on which the ethic rests reminds us that the ethic is a set of principles designed to enhance the harmony of the environment and the possibilities of creatures' flourishing within it. Fourth, the ethic is an ethic which is realistic about the kinds of species included in this world's environment. Failure to correctly characterize the kinds of species in an environment can only lead to an ethic which fantasizes coordinations which can never be, for is not the real problem of environmental ethics that humankind is a manipulative species? Fifth, the ethic aims at the harmonization of value. By this I mean that the conception of the values found in the thought experiment does not seem to carry implications of any normative prioritization among those values. An ethic might be

⁴ J. Baird Callicott, "Elements of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 1 (1979): 71-82, esp. 72-77.

charged with a centrism contrary to the ethic's being environmental if the value distinctively associated with a certain kind of locus of value were exalted. Contrarily, an ethic which rejects kind-centric prioritization as a strategy of values conflict resolution, in favor of, say, strategies of conflict dissolution or mutual compromise, is appropriately called environmental, for the latter tend best to maintain the stable functioning of the ecosystem.

What does all of this suggest? I do not mean to attempt to be definitive about the shape of an adequate environmental ethic. What I have attempted to do is (1) to divorce attributions of value from judgments of the interest of the attributor, (2) to develop the concept of a locus of value, (3) to explore the interconnections between the goods of individuals and the goods of populations, species, and of life, (4) to outline how a nonanthropocentric conception of value is possible without being holistic, and (5) to suggest the reasonableness on naturalistic grounds of the attribution of some sorts of rights to individuals who have certain kinds of awareness. I trust that the extent to which I have faithfully tried to include (3) in my agenda shows how open I remain to exploring the intricate connections between the individual and the holistic good.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[4]

Postmodernism, Value and Objectivity

ROBIN ATTFIELD

*School of English, Communication and Philosophy
University of Wales Cardiff
PO Box 94, Cardiff CF1 3XB, UK*

ABSTRACT

The first half of this paper replies to three postmodernist challenges to belief in objective intrinsic value. One lies in the claim that the language of objective value presupposes a flawed, dualistic distinction between subjects and objects. The second lies in the claim that there are no objective values which do not arise within and/or depend upon particular cultures or valuational frameworks. The third comprises the suggestion that belief in objective values embodies the representational theory of perception. In the second half, a defence is offered of belief in objective intrinsic value. Objectivists hold that axiological properties supply interpersonal reasons for action for any relevant moral agent. The intrinsically valuable is understood as what there is reason to desire, cherish or foster in virtue of the nature of the state or object concerned. The concept of intrinsic value is shown to be instantiated, and defended against a range of criticisms.

KEY WORDS

Intrinsic value, extrinsic value, postmodernism, objectivity, subjectivism, dualism, representationalism, axiology

INTRODUCTION

This essay ¹ appeals to the shared presuppositions of groups of human beings, whether gathered or dispersed in space (such as you, the readers of this paper), engaged in reflection, whether on environmental values and their metaphysical status or on any other theme. This is particularly relevant to the first half of the paper, which replies to some postmodernist criticisms of belief in objective intrinsic value, including some presented in recent years as criticisms of Holmes Rolston III by J. Baird Callicott ² and Bryan G. Norton.³ (I shall be using

'postmodernist' in what follows to refer to stances, arguments and related critiques of the kinds presented by Callicott and Norton in these essays.) In the second half, these replies are supplemented with an attempt to defend this same belief.

Since Callicott and Norton seem implicitly to assume, like many others, that hardly any forms of dualism are acceptable, let alone any modernist forms,⁴ I will say a little in support of some of them. Then I will focus on some of the grounds for scepticism as to objective intrinsic value. Among the assumptions which I shall not seek to defend, but shall just take for granted, is the belief that you, the reader, like your fellow-readers, can and sometimes do reflect on the natural environment, on scientific and normative beliefs about it, and occasionally on second-order, metaphysical beliefs about those beliefs.

My discussion will also serve to examine three postmodernist challenges to belief in objective intrinsic value. One lies in the claim that the distinction between subjects and objects is a Cartesian or Kantian modernist illusion, and that the language of objective value presupposes this flawed and dualistic distinction.⁵ The second lies in the claim, by which postmodernism is sometimes defined, that there are no objective values which do not arise within and/or depend upon particular cultures or valuational frameworks. The third consists in the suggestion that belief in objective values is bound up with the representational theory of perception. All three of these challenges to belief in objective intrinsic value have their contemporary champions, as will shortly be seen.

1. SUBJECTS AND OBJECTS

Consider the first claim, concerning the distinction between valuing subjects (subjects who reflect on value) and potentially valuable objects (objects of value) being illusory.⁶ Since this distinction is between two categories, subjects and objects, it is to that extent dualistic. My first point, however, is that those who reject a dualism of minds and bodies are by no means committed to rejecting this quite different kind of dualism. For even if minds are clusters of properties and/or dispositions of material objects, and thus themselves material, the possibility remains of some material entities having consciousness, intentions and thoughts, and thus comprising subjects, and of these subjects reflecting on the other material objects, or all material objects, or on anything whatever, actual or possible. Thus the wrong-headedness of some forms of dualism would not imply that all dualism is wrong, or that this sort is wrong. Indeed, if this sort of dualism is not a possibility, then you (the reader of this essay) would not be able to scan and survey it or to reflect on its strengths or weaknesses.

My next point is that all readers of this essay (including its author) are committed to accepting this distinction, even if any are consciously inclined to reject it. For none of us can help believing that we, a scattered group of human

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

beings, are reflecting (as we read) on value and objectivity, and on various beliefs (in some cases metaphysical beliefs) about these things. And if we believe this, then whatever we may say about the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics, or the self as a social construct, or the relational theories of perception and of identity, we also recognise and accept the distinction between thinkers and objects of thought. For we presuppose this distinction before we can as much as consider the nature of selves or of objects.

Next, something should be said about quantum physics, and Heisenberg's and Schrödinger's indeterminacy principle. Does quantum physics, the Copenhagen interpretation or the indeterminacy principle imply either the conclusion that observers cannot be distinguished from what they observe, or the counterpart widely-held conclusion that all properties, value included, are observer-dependent? Callicott has argued to this effect,⁷ concluding that 'Mass and motion, color and flavor, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, all alike, are equally potentialities which are actualized in relation to us or to similarly constituted organisms'.⁸

These conclusions about the observer-dependence of all properties including value are rejected by John O'Neill, a philosopher of science who contributed one of the essays about intrinsic value in *The Monist* of 1992. O'Neill points out that the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics is only one interpretation among many,⁹ a claim borne out by the physicist Peter Hodgson,¹⁰ who adds that many physicists reject it. O'Neill also points out that in any case the Copenhagen interpretation need not imply the conclusions just mentioned. For Niels Bohr can be construed as taking an instrumentalist interpretation of quantum theory, with no ontological commitments at all;¹¹ and he certainly need not be construed as maintaining that all properties of electrons are observer-dependent, or that no electron would have either position or velocity if there were no observers. (O'Neill adds that 'the Copenhagen interpretation is conceptually conservative, and denies the possibility that we could replace the concepts of classical physics by any others'.¹²)

While there would almost certainly be no finite observers if there were no objects, there is no need to hold that the identity of particular observers is constituted by their relation to the particular objects of their reflections. Indeed the very claim that this might be the case itself presupposes that the observers already exist so as to be able to have some relation to these objects, as is conveyed by the phrase 'their relation'. In fact, subjects such as ourselves turn out to be capable of undergoing radical changes of scene, and of the objects of our reflection, without forfeiting identity. Nor did Heisenberg's or Schrödinger's identity depend on their reflection on any particular electron or group of electrons; nor did Bohr's identity depend on his reflections on Heisenberg and Schrödinger; nor do ours depend on our reflections on Bohr, or on anyone in particular at all.

As for the conclusion that properties are observer-dependent, few would maintain that every one of their own actual and possible properties are observer-dependent. Besides, it is not as if statements about the middle-sized objects of our acquaintance and their properties could be translated without remainder into statements about electrons, even if it were clear that statements about the properties of electrons were all observer-dependent themselves. Indeed we can accept that observation generates changes to the world, without needing to adopt at the same time a Fritjof Capra-like relational metaphysic.¹³

Quantum physics, after all, is designed to explain, or deepen our understanding of, the nature of the objects of observation which human subjects observe and study. It would be paradoxical if its investigations mandated the conclusion that the distinction between subjects and objects which gave rise to its own introduction was misguided in the first place. Fortunately there is no need to hold that it does so.

But unless there is some other ground for denying the distinction between subjects and objects, no reasons seem to remain against accepting this supposedly modernist distinction between subjects and objects, or against objects having objective, i.e. interpersonally discoverable, properties. Hence the objection that objective intrinsic value would be one of these properties cannot be held to count against belief in it. Indeed, Descartes and Kant may each have been confused or wrong on some epistemological and/or metaphysical matters, but they will not have been wrong in the matter of the possibility of the existence of subjects, and in the corresponding possibility of the existence of objects with objective properties. Nor were their ancient and medieval predecessors who recognised this distinction mistaken; for there is actually nothing distinctively modernist about it.

2. RELATIVE FRAMEWORKS

But there is another postmodernist doctrine which would also involve rejection of belief in objective intrinsic value, the claim that there are no objective values which do not arise within and/or depend upon particular cultures or valuational frameworks.¹⁴ Adherents of this doctrine can, it would seem, accept the distinction just discussed between subjects and objects. Indeed those who require of a culture or of a valuational framework that one or more subjects participate or have participated in it are probably committed to that very pre-postmodern distinction. But this just serves to underline the distinctness of the current doctrine, and also the heterogeneity of postmodernism.

My claim, however, is that this doctrine is in tension with our reflective beliefs about value. In biographical terms, no doubt, values are learned within particular cultures and/or frameworks, and to this extent the doctrine is trivially true. But when it is interpreted in such a way as to imply the denial of inter-

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

cultural, universal values, it is neither true nor trivial. But first, to give this discussion a more substantive turn, let us consider the value of tolerance, a trait widely recognised as a value, if not as an unqualified one, for this turns out to produce a further problem for the postmodernist doctrine.

Now postmodernists of this variety might well claim to give differential support to tolerance through remarking how the rival position of ethical absolutism can lead to intolerance, and relatedly through claiming credit for rejecting all such absolutist claims. Yet once confronted with an intolerant culture or valuational framework, no basis for rational persuasion in the cause of tolerance remains open to them. For the adherents of the intolerant culture can stress that on the postmodernist showing there are no intercultural standards, and thus no bases for appeal beyond the culture in question; and the postmodernist adherent of tolerance has to agree, whether or not it is assumed or claimed that all ethical usage can be construed in relativist (or, in Harman's terms, 'quasi-absolutist') terms.¹⁵ However, if this is assumed or claimed, then the relativist has to acknowledge, implausibly, that there is not even the possibility of an appeal beyond the culture in question.¹⁶

The only alternative for the relativist seems to be to claim that there is a valuational framework shared by all cultures, one, maybe, which respects human or natural rights, and which requires tolerance with few if any qualifications. But such a framework is just what the postmodernist claim was devised to deny. For if there is such an overriding universal or cosmopolitan ethic, then no distinctive objection remains, from postmodernism thus interpreted, to belief in intercultural, objective intrinsic value. Further, while the re-emergence of an intolerant absolutism is a perennial possibility, there are all kinds of candidate intercultural values (rights among them) which would militate against intercultural values being intolerant in content, or being held in an intolerant manner.

Another reason for questioning the latest postmodernist doctrine is that it makes sense to question the rightness, or the aptness, or the value of the deliverances of any culture and of any valuational framework. But if the doctrine were true, then this questioning would amount to asking whether these deliverances complied with or corresponded to the values of one or another culture or valuational framework, whether the same one or a different one. Most people would agree, though, that this is not what such questions or questionings amount to; for we are not asking whether the values of one culture or framework comply with those of one or another such culture or framework, but whether they are good or right. So the doctrine is not true.

This argument is clearly a resuscitation of G.E. Moore's 'Open Question' argument, and cannot be regarded as conclusive.¹⁷ For this argument assumes (rather than shows) that no definition of rightness is to be found, and thus begs the question. It claims as a premise that it is always an open question whether the judgments in question are good or right, but this cannot be safely assumed. Thus a successful analysis of concepts like rightness has not been shown to be

impossible. The issue that now arises is whether a reply of this kind can be mounted to the Moorean argument presented above.

But such a reply can only help the postmodernist if rightness or whatever other value-concept is in question can be plausibly defined in a postmodernist manner, i.e. in a culture-relative or framework-relative way. For only if such a definition succeeds can the postmodernist *both* block the suggestion that it is an open question whether given judgments about goodness or rightness from within a culture really are good or right, *and* continue to uphold the postmodernist doctrine. As it happens, a culture-relative definition of rightness has recently been offered by David Wong,¹⁸ of which an ampler discussion than is here possible would be in place.¹⁹ Suffice it here to say that any culture-relative definition of rightness suffers from the problem of making the same action both right on the strength of the norms of one culture, and wrong on the strength of the norms of another; and Wong is not immune from this problem. The only way for cultural relativists to avoid this problem is to maintain that the norms of all cultures coincide; but this is just what the postmodernist is seeking to deny.

However, Robert Elliot has produced a framework-relative account of valuation which, through defining value in a manner indexed to particular valuers, avoids generating such contradictory judgments.²⁰ For if judgments of value are all relative to diverse valuational frameworks in the first place, then apparently conflicting judgments are really compatible expressions of judgment from within different frameworks with different criteria of valuation. Further, questions about whether given judgments are really right turn out themselves, given this position, to be asked relative to some valuational framework, and thus to be compatible with the postmodernist doctrine.²¹

But this more sophisticated position apparently conflicts with the phenomenology of our responses to seemingly conflicting values; for I would claim that when confronted with conflicting judgments of value we would usually maintain that there really is a disagreement.²² If I am right, this would count against a theory which relativises disagreement away (except when both judgments are grounded in one and the same valuational framework). Since in any case the argument from tolerance presents an independent problem for the postmodernist doctrine, no more needs to be said here about this defence of that doctrine. My conclusion is that this postmodernist doctrine is no more formidable an obstacle to belief in objective intrinsic value than the one considered previously.

3. INTRINSIC VALUE AND THE REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY OF PERCEPTION

A third postmodernist claim held to count against belief in objective intrinsic value consists in the importance of rejecting the representational theory of perception. Belief in such value is held by Bryan Norton to be bound up (at least

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

in the work of Holmes Rolston) with the belief that humans stand in a picturing relation to nature, and such representationalism Norton understandably rejects, as 'Descartes' most pervasive, important and devastating legacy as the father of modern philosophy'. And Rolston, claims Norton, 'restricts possible solutions' to solving 'the epistemological problem of providing warrant for environmental values' 'to those that can be formulated within a representational theory of perception'.²³

Now the representational theory of perception is usually taken to be the theory that observers are aware not of things but of ideas of things; and this doctrine, found differently in Descartes and Locke, seems to introduce an unnecessary intermediary level (that of ideas) to accounts of perception. In this form, then, the theory should probably be rejected, and this is what Norton does. But John Searle, for example, is among many contemporary philosophers who also reject this theory,²⁴ and if Searle's position had to be classified, the appropriate term would surely be 'modernist' rather than 'postmodernist'. In this same form, then, there is surely no reason why the believer in objective intrinsic value should adhere to a theory which is also rejected by many *non*-postmodernist philosophers; and it is not at all clear that Rolston in particular is an adherent of this theory.

While I would agree with Norton that Rolston's phrase 'we do stand in some picturing relation to nature' is unfortunate, a different understanding of Rolston's point seems to be in place. What I think he had in mind is that human language and beliefs should reflect or correspond to the facts of the world out there, and this he chose to call 'picturing'. But as long as 'picturing' was not intended literally, this claim need not imply a belief about some isomorphism, or parallelism of structure, between thought or language on the one hand, and reality on the other. What Rolston requires, and certainly what in my view he should require, is rather that thought and language be *true* of reality, a stance that may not be postmodernist, but does not remotely involve representationalism.

Now granted his explicit adherence to a 'relational theory of perception', Norton would probably reject what I take to be Rolston's correspondence theory of truth, for he seems to reject belief both in objects situated out there and in properties situated out there for propositions to be true of. But this rejection is in no way implicit in (let alone equivalent to) rejecting 'the representational theory of perception, which is Descartes' most pervasive, important and devastating legacy as the father of modern philosophy'.²⁵ For the rejection of this Cartesian theory is compatible with metaphysical realism and with a correspondence theory of truth. Language could be true and could correspond to the facts without picturing or representing them. If, however, belief in the possibility of correspondence with the facts is also regarded as representational, or if 'representationalism' is a term covering all non-relational theories of value, then the project of talking the rest of us out of all this is going to be immensely harder than that of persuading us to jettison Descartes' representational views on perception, the

task undertaken by Norton. Short of being presented with some new arguments, correspondence theorists can afford to remain unaffected by the arguments against Cartesian representationalism (sound as they are), and the same conclusion applies to objectivists about value.²⁶

This is not the place to discuss further Norton's call for relational theories of perception, as opposed to the topic of relational theories of value. However, before I return to relational theories of value, I will turn to the issue of whether true beliefs are possible about objective value in particular, and attempt to dispel some of the meta-ethical worries which predispose some axiologists to hold that value-talk ascribes not objective properties but relations with subjects or observers.

4. THE NATURE OF INTRINSIC VALUE

Here an analysis of intrinsic value may help. By 'value' I do not mean some nonnatural property, but rather what there is reason to desire, foster or cherish. Intrinsic value contrasts with extrinsic value (that is, with what there is reason to desire, cherish or foster for reasons beyond the nature of its bearer), and contrasts thus with derivative kinds of value. Kinds of derivative value include instrumental value (which explains itself), contributive value (present, for example, when your understanding contributes to the value of our friendship), and inherent value (exemplified, for example, when a scene or picture facilitates valuable experiences of appreciation by making them possible). By contrast, intrinsic value derives from nothing but the nature of the state or object which bears it, and the intrinsically valuable is thus what there is reason to desire, cherish or foster in virtue of the nature of the state or object concerned, in contrast with ulterior reasons.²⁷ Accordingly intrinsic value admits of degrees, for there can be more or stronger reason, and thus degrees of reason, to desire, cherish or foster something.²⁸

This account already diverges from a nonnaturalist account. For one thing, according to nonnaturalists, fundamental nonnatural properties such as 'good' and 'valuable' are unamenable to being analysed, whereas I am suggesting that 'valuable' can be analysed, and also how this is to be done. There again, nonnaturalism makes the relation between the natures of valuable entities and the reasons for desiring or cherishing them mysterious and synthetic, not conceptual and analytic (as I am suggesting). Thus I have no need to make the discerning of these relations depend on acts of synthetic intuition, operating without grounds, as nonnaturalism does.²⁹

Others sometimes use 'intrinsic value' to mean the property of actually being valued either as a goal or for itself.³⁰ However, as pragmatists point out, in real life such values and goals often merge into ulterior goals or ends, or generate such ends. Since this is so, the criticisms on the part of writers such as John Dewey

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

of the distinction between intrinsic value (in this sense) and instrumental value (in the corresponding sense of the property of actually being valued instrumentally) are understandable.³¹ But these criticisms have no bite on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value in the senses which I am using. For while the distinction between valuing nonderivatively and valuing derivatively is a psychological one, and is readily crossed, the distinction between being derivatively and nonderivatively valuable is quite different. No doubt some actual processes will actually be valuable both intrinsically (and thus non-derivatively) and instrumentally (and thus derivatively), such as, perhaps, the process of being educated, for plausibly there is reason to desire this both for itself and for its outcomes, such as employability. But the possibility of the two sorts of value being present together does not weaken the distinction between them. (As will already be apparent, I am not suggesting that value which is not instrumental is always intrinsic, as if there were no other kinds of non-intrinsic, or extrinsic, value,³² such as inherent value and contributive value – as introduced above.)

Incidentally, the property a thing has when it is valued for itself or as an end, what Eugene Hargrove has called 'weak anthropocentric intrinsic value',³³ may or may not indicate the presence of value in my sense, depending on whether there are nonderivative reasons to desire, foster or cherish the thing in question. This seems to make it an open question, though one usually answerable in a positive direction, whether such things are intrinsically valuable (in my sense). For the same reasons it is an open question whether value as thus defined is or is not associated with reasons for action, or thus carries normative implications. When there are such reasons, as there usually will be, such value will be suited to practical reasoning because of the reasons; but where such reasons are absent, it would not seem suited to the purposes of guiding practical reasoning at all.

The objection may here be raised that the objectivist concept of intrinsic value may not encapsulate the values of environmentalists, either because it has a different application, or perhaps even because it has no application at all. But the issue of whether the notion of intrinsic value has application and thus of whether there is anything of intrinsic value should not, in my view, be settled by whether this concept is needed to articulate the values of environmentalists, let alone by whether it best articulates them. By the same token, nor should the issue of whether an objectivist understanding of talk of intrinsic value is in place be made to hang on this criterion. For, while I believe that such talk can be employed to articulate some of the values of environmentalism, and that talk of inherent value and other kinds of extrinsic value³⁴ can articulate other such values, like the value of natural beauty, it should not be assumed in advance that the values of environmentalism are sound ones or defensible ones, or (come to that) even coherent. Sooner than align these issues with environmental campaigning, we should approach them rather by reflection on axiological and ethical discourse in general.

5. COULD INTRINSIC VALUE BE UNINSTANTIATED?

Thus the issue of whether anything has intrinsic value is also the issue of whether there are any non-derivative reasons to desire, foster or cherish anything. Might there be nothing of intrinsic value? If this were so, then this concept would clearly be an irrelevance, in virtue of being empty and uninstantiated; and these are among the worries which need to be dispelled. In order to answer this question, I want to adjust an argument produced by Aristotle in a parallel (but different) context, that of the issue of whether there might be nothing which is valued as an end.³⁵

Let us imagine, then, that nothing is intrinsically valuable. What, I suggest, follows is that nothing is valuable instrumentally either. For if anything has instrumental value, there must be something else which confers value on it. This further item might, admittedly, also be of instrumental value. But there could not be an infinite series of items of instrumental value with each item dependent for its value on ulterior members of the series. For in that case there would be nothing which gave value to any of the items in the series, and so not a single one of them would be valuable. Thus either something is intrinsically valuable, or nothing is instrumentally valuable. But, while some radical sceptics might be willing to endorse the belief that nothing is instrumentally valuable, in practice everyone who has not abandoned all reflection and all endeavours is committed to (at least) the instrumental value of breathing. Parallel arguments would readily show that either something is intrinsically valuable, or nothing is contributively valuable; and, again, that either something is intrinsically valuable, or nothing is inherently valuable. If so, then either something is intrinsically valuable, or nothing is valuable at all.³⁶ And this latter belief (that nothing is valuable at all) is even harder to accept than the view that nothing has instrumental value. Imagine trying to justify this belief, if it is true. Any attempt to do anything, I suggest, presupposes that it is false.

The argument from the impossibility of infinite sequences of derivatively valuable entities has been criticised by Monroe Beardsley and by Anthony Weston on the alleged count of sharing the shortcomings of the argument to a First Cause.³⁷ But whereas an infinite series of causes comprises a genuine possibility, no such possibility arises of an infinite series of extrinsically valuable items, unless something outside the series supplies a reason for their value. In actual fact, an infinite series of causes may itself also be argued to be in need of explanation, Hume and Russell notwithstanding; but that is another issue.

The case of dictionaries might be offered as a possible counter-example to the impossibility of an infinite sequence of extrinsically significant items lacking an ulterior explanation of its or their significance. For dictionaries such as Webster's use a large (though finite) number of words to expound the meanings of other words of the same level and order; and maybe there is nothing but the physical limits of dictionaries to prevent such sets of words being infinite. In any case the

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

words in dictionaries somehow explain each other, without resort to words outside their circle.

Now clearly this would-be counter-example has to concern same-language dictionaries, for French-English dictionaries and other translanguistic works of reference specifically use a different set of words to explain the meanings of the terms which are interpreted. But this point begins to show why dictionaries would not work if they attempted to explain the meanings of unknown terms by other unknown terms, albeit in the same language. They work because their users already understand some of the terms, and they employ the known to explain the unknown. Thus some of the words in the dictionary are effectively on a different level from the rest, the level, that is, of relatively familiar words, and there is no mystery about the meanings of unknown terms being explained by terms such as these. While this is a comprehensible process, it does not make comprehensible any process by which items of derivative value could somehow serve to explain the value of other items of the same level and kind (that is, other items of derivative value), without this derivative value being dependent on nonderivative value.

In actual fact, we often believe that we know what gives their value to such items, and usually find that (at one or two removes) this is something widely recognised to have intrinsic value (such as pleasure or autonomy or well-being). By contrast, where the point of an activity is clearly instrumental itself (e.g. the acquisition of money or power), and no intrinsic good is in the offing, we soon become sceptical about whether the activity has any value (or justification) at all. Thus where the dictionary example is analogous to the issue on hand, as it might seem to be with respect to the analogy between familiar words and familiar values, the analogy if anything supports belief in ulterior sources of value, and not in a circle of items of extrinsic value with miraculous capabilities for mutual justification.

To return to questions of intrinsic value, and to put the significance of the recent argument into a new perspective, a world without intrinsic value would, as Robert Edgar Carter has argued, be an entirely arbitrary world, a world entirely lacking in non-arbitrary reasons for action.³⁸ Fortunately, as is shown by the argument about intrinsic and extrinsic value just presented, our world is not such. Some theorists, however, might suggest that relativist accounts of value need not make values arbitrary. Whether or not this view should be accepted (on which, see the remarks about relativism and normativity towards the end of this essay), it should here be stressed that Carter's point about arbitrariness (the only context in which arbitrariness is mentioned in his essay) concerns not relativist accounts of value, but what the world would be like if intrinsic value (however construed) were absent from it altogether. His point is difficult to deny.

None of this, of course, settles where intrinsic value is located, or whether it should be given an objectivist, subjectivist or relational construal, though it removes some barriers to the former view. There is no need for present purposes

to linger over the issue of the location of intrinsic value, except to remark that if the growing consensus of ethicists is correct that cruelty and negligence towards nonhuman animals would be wrong even where there is no impact on human beings, and for no reason beyond animal suffering, then it seems to follow that sometimes intrinsic value or (in this case) disvalue is located in states of nonhuman creatures. And on some but not all definitions of 'anthropocentric', this already shows that anthropocentric accounts of the location of intrinsic value and its extension are wrong. My position makes it important that such accounts are at any rate *capable* of being wrong.³⁹

6. SUBJECTIVISM AND OBJECTIVISM

Subjectivist interpretations of intrinsic value remain possible. But, given the sense of 'intrinsic value' specified above, they are difficult to defend. If 'having value' meant 'being valued', then subjectivism would be irresistible, and 'having intrinsic value' might simply mean 'being valued (by someone or other) as an end or for itself'. But if 'valuable' means 'bearing reasons for being desired, fostered or cherished', it is implausible that 'this is valuable' is equivalent to 'this is valued by X', or 'by Xs' (as subjectivists used to suggest), or even 'within the Y valuational framework'.⁴⁰ The valuers concerned might well actually have their reasons, but, given this sense of 'valuable', the mere act of valuing on their part, however reasonable, would be insufficient of itself to make the objects of valuation valuable.

This is because the reasons in terms of which value has been defined above need to be understood as unrestrictedly interpersonal reasons. While there is no certainty that agents, or even that moral agents, will be motivated by them, necessarily such reasons (simply *as* interpersonal reasons) are among the reasons which moral agents capable of acting on them should consider and by which they should be influenced. But subjectivist theorists of value are unlikely to accommodate this normativity, and sometimes, as in the writings of John Mackie, pride themselves that it is absent from their notion of value.⁴¹ Their problem then is whether the notion of value which they employ can do the work and take the strain of supplying reasons for action. Incidentally, these problems for subjectivism retain their significance however frequently actual judgments are affected by subjective factors. It might be suggested that the subjective character of many judgments makes axiological subjectivism less implausible, and axiological objectivism less plausible. But the verdict that some judgments are subjectively biased presupposes that the possibility exists of judgments being unbiased, and this is precisely what objectivism affirms, and what its denial at least ostensibly undermines.

The claim of objectivism, at least as I understand it, is that axiological properties (such as value and disvalue) supply interpersonal reasons for action

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

for any moral agent to whose actions they apply. If this is what opponents of objectivism object to, they seem to be suggesting that no objective states of affairs could supply such reasons for action; and thus that neither pleasure nor autonomy nor friendship nor suffering could supply such reasons, until and unless someone does or would value them. And this is what I find implausible. If their objection is to nonnatural properties, no more than synthetically related to states such as pleasure and happiness, then I can sympathise with the objection, as these properties would then be too insecurely related to reasons for action. Also the nonnaturalist claim that certain states are necessarily but synthetically good is prone to generate, as David O. Brink has pointed out,⁴² the claim that these synthetic truths are self-justifying (for no other form of justification is available). But this is a foundationalist position, with whose rejection I can sympathise; for, if foundationalists purport to recognise self-justifying propositions, I am certainly no foundationalist.

But, as we have seen, objectivists need not be nonnaturalists, and can go along with belief in what Jaegwon Kim⁴³ has called 'strong supervenience', and thus with the belief that what is of intrinsic value is so by virtue of conceptual necessity.

7. RELATIONAL ACCOUNTS

However, while objectivism may now seem to supply a plausible construal of intrinsic-value talk, there are several remaining alternatives. Thus some philosophers analyse reasons as desires, and make reasons for action apply only to those capable of being motivated accordingly.⁴⁴ The corresponding account of 'value' would relativise interpersonal reasons, and thus value, to groups or communities capable of acting on certain motives, thus producing a relational and relativist analysis of value-talk in general. But this account, among other problems, also seems to deprive value-talk of its full normativity. For states of value supply reasons for action to agents in general, and not just to specified individuals or restricted groups. It will not do for relativists to deny that such states can supply reasons to agents in general, maybe on the strength of their relativism; for this is what is ordinarily *meant* by 'value' and 'valuable', and the onus is on the relativist to show that this ordinary usage is incoherent.

Others define 'value' as what certain valuers do value or would value, apparently supplying further relational accounts.⁴⁵ But if an account of this general character were to define 'value' as 'what would be valued by valuers whose valuations are shaped by all the relevant reasons for action', then this definition would be extensionally equivalent to my own, since all the work would now be done not by 'valuers' but by 'reasons for action'.⁴⁶ At the level of meta-ethics, this relational account would actually be equivalent to an objectivist account (at least in the sense which I have offered). If, however, such accounts

do not specify that the valuations alluded to in their definitions be shaped by all the relevant reasons for action, then these accounts of 'value' would seem to be defective in this very regard.

Michael Smith's position is slightly different, as he seeks to relativise 'value' to the valuations of rational agents, ones, that is, who care about all the reasons.⁴⁷ My view here is that it is not irrational sometimes to fail to care about some of them; for someone too exhausted by weariness or too benumbed by suffering to care might still remain a rational person. However, if Smith may be interpreted as relativising value to agents who care about all the reasons, then his view is effectively an objectivist position too. There seems, in any case, to be a growing consensus that value is to be understood in terms of interpersonal reasons for action. Nor is this position cryptically subjectivist, as some might claim. For it is one thing to refer to interpersonal reasons for action, as the growing consensus does, and quite another to make value a function of valuations or of valuational frameworks, as subjectivists do.

By contrast, most other kinds of relational (and thus anthropogenic) definitions of 'value', by appealing to actual or hypothetical valuations, and not to rational ones, seem, like subjectivist accounts, to be hard put to it to accommodate the normativity of value-language. For these accounts invoke what would actually be valued, and what would actually be valued is unlikely to be wholly and invariably equivalent to what there is reason to value. Thus, like subjectivist construals of value, relational accounts are less plausible than objectivist accounts such as the one defended here.

CONCLUSION

While I am aware that more could be said than has here been said about some of the ramifications, I have attempted to shed some light on the debate between defenders of belief in objective intrinsic value, and their postmodernist and other critics. I have presented an analysis of value in terms of reasons for action, and have argued that such an analysis distinctly favours an objectivist construal of value over the alternatives. Although I have not definitively excluded all other analyses, I have argued that they are all problematic for ordinary uses of 'value' and 'valuable'.⁴⁸ Earlier I examined three postmodernist objections to belief in objective intrinsic value, namely: the rejection of the subject/object distinction; the charge that there are no objective values not relative to particular cultures or valuational frameworks; and the implications of rejecting the representational theory of perception. None of the objections, I have argued, stand up to scrutiny, or give grounds to withdraw or modify belief in intrinsic value, or in an objectivist understanding of this belief.

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this essay was presented to a Seminar at Florida Atlantic University concerned with the metaphysics of environmental ethics and of claims about the value of nature in 1995. I am grateful to Don E. Marietta Jr. and to Lester Embree for their hospitality, and for their help, and that of other members of the Florida seminar, of my colleague Alex Miller, and of three reviewers for *Environmental Values*, in the preparation of this essay.

² Callicott 1992.

³ Norton 1992.

⁴ This position seems to be suggested in Callicott 1986 and in Callicott 1992 at p. 137; see also Norton 1992.

⁵ For a distinctive defence of Rolston against this charge, see Preston 1998. While the current paper was composed before Preston's paper came to my notice, there is considerable common ground between our two papers.

⁶ This criticism may be found in Callicott 1992, p. 140, and in Norton 1992, pp. 215–218.

⁷ See Callicott 1985, p. 271; Callicott 1992, p. 137.

⁸ Callicott 1985, p. 271.

⁹ O'Neill 1992, at pp. 126f and 135f; also O'Neill 1991, chapter 6, and O'Neill 1993, pp. 16f., 150 and 184, n. 21.

¹⁰ Hodgson, 1984; also Hodgson 1998.

¹¹ O'Neill 1993, p. 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 184, n. 21. While Henry J. Folse, Jr. adopts a different account of Bohr, he rejects subjectivist interpretations, in favour of an objectivist and interactionist reading. See Folse 1993; also Folse 1985.

¹³ See Capra 1975; also Callicott 1985.

¹⁴ See, for example, Elliot 1992.

¹⁵ See Harman 1996, pp. 33–37.

¹⁶ See further Attfield 1995, pp. 220–229. An argument along similar lines can be found in Williams 1972, at pp. 34–39.

¹⁷ I have criticised G.E. Moore's 'Open Question' argument in Attfield 1987, chapter 10. This chapter has been revised and updated in Attfield 1995, chapter 12.

¹⁸ Wong 1984, chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁹ For a discussion of Wong's position, see Attfield 1995, chapter 13.

²⁰ A sophisticated version of this position is found in Elliot 1992, at pp. 140–141.

²¹ Elliot 1992; see also Elliot 1994.

²² Elliot's framework-relative position is discussed in Attfield 1995, chapter 3.

²³ Norton 1992, pp. 216–218; the passages quoted are from p. 216.

²⁴ Searle 1983, chapter 2.

²⁵ Norton 1992, p. 216.

²⁶ For another defence of Rolston against the charge of representationalism, see Preston 1998, pp. 427f.

²⁷ Michael J. Zimmerman's recent defence of the concept of intrinsic value (Zimmerman 1999) deals well with arguments such as those of Peter Geach that there is no such quality as intrinsic goodness, but his suggestion, for which he does not argue, that being intrinsically good involves a particular (morality-related) way of being good, is less

convincing. (Intrinsic goods are as often and as understandably sought on a prudential basis as on a moral basis.)

²⁸ A similar point has been made by James P. Sterba about his concept of 'recipient-centered intrinsic value' (Sterba 1998, p. 146). Sterba's concept, however, is applicable only to entities which have a good (as his definition makes clear), unlike the more traditional concept explicated here, which is applicable, unlike Sterba's concept, to states such as pleasure and happiness and to processes such as the development of a creature's essential capacities.

²⁹ A more detailed critique of nonnaturalism is presented in Attfield 1995, at pp. 198–200, 208f., and 231–236.

³⁰ This could well be what Sterba has in mind when he speaks of 'agent-centered intrinsic value', contrasted with 'recipient-centered intrinsic value' (Sterba 1998, p. 146).

³¹ Dewey 1939.

³² This possible source of confusion is well exposed in Korsgaard 1983, at pp. 169f.

³³ Hargrove 1992; see also Hargrove 1988.

³⁴ Thus Karen Green, a defender of objective intrinsic value, has cogently argued that many of the values of environmentalists are nonetheless extrinsic; see Green 1996.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a18–22. My argument is also indebted to Routley and Routley 1980.

³⁶ See also Attfield 1995, chapter 3.

³⁷ Beardsley 1965; Weston 1985.

³⁸ Carter 1967.

³⁹ Readers interested in my account of intersubjective methods for locating moral standing and intrinsic value are referred to places where I have discussed these questions more fully. See Attfield 1995, chapters 2 and 3; also Attfield 1983 (reprinted in Attfield 1994, pp. 91–105).

⁴⁰ This is the view of Elliot; see note 14 above.

⁴¹ Mackie 1977, chapter 1.

⁴² Brink 1989, pp. 107–122.

⁴³ Kim 1984, at pp. 157–163.

⁴⁴ Thus Harman 1975.

⁴⁵ Lewis 1989.

⁴⁶ The theory of Mark Johnston (1989), is close to this position, but remains relational at core.

⁴⁷ Smith 1989.

⁴⁸ It has been suggested that my conclusions could be better supported by appeal to the Weak Anthropic Principle, and what might be considered its implication that the actual universe has objective intrinsic value. But such an appeal would presuppose that a successful defence of objective intrinsic value, such as I have been attempting to offer, is already available.

POSTMODERNISM, VALUE AND OBJECTIVITY

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thompson as *The Ethics of Aristotle*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953
- Attfield, Robin 1983. 'Methods of Ecological Ethics', *Metaphilosophy*, **14**: 195–208
- Attfield, Robin 1987. *A Theory of Value and Obligation*. London, New York and Sydney: Croom Helm
- Attfield, Robin 1994. *Environmental Philosophy: Principles and Prospects*. Aldershot: Avebury, and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate.
- Attfield, Robin 1995. *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Éditions Rodopi.
- Attfield, Robin and Andrew Belsey (eds) 1994. *Philosophy and the Natural Environment*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Beardsley, Monroe C. 1965. 'Intrinsic Value', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, **26**: 1–17.
- Brink, David O. 1989. *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Callicott, J. Baird 1985. 'Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory and Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics*, **7**: 257–275.
- Callicott, J. Baird 1986. 'The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology', *Environmental Ethics*, **8**: 301–16.
- Callicott, J Baird 1992. 'Rolston on Intrinsic Value: A Deconstruction', *Environmental Ethics*, **14**: 129–143.
- Capra, Fritjof 1975. *The Tao of Physics*. London: Wildwood House.
- Carter, Robert Edgar 1967. 'The Importance of Intrinsic Value', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, **28**: 567–577.
- Dewey, John 1939. *Theory of Valuation*. Chicago: International Encyclopedia of United Science.
- Elliot, Robert 1992. 'Intrinsic Value, Environmental Obligation and Naturalness', *The Monist*, **75**: 138–160.
- Elliot, Robert 1994. 'Ecology and the Ethics of Environmental Restoration', in Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey (eds), *Philosophy and the Natural Environment* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 31–43
- Folse, Henry J., Jr., 1985. *The Philosophy of Niels Bohr*. Amsterdam: North Holland Physics Publishing.
- Folse, Henry J., Jr., 1993. 'The Environment and the Lesson of Epistemological Complementarity', *Environmental Ethics*, **15**: 345–353.
- Green, Karen 1996. 'Two Distinctions in Environmental Goodness', *Environmental Values*, **5**: 31–46.
- Hargrove, Eugene C. 1988. *Foundations of Environmental Ethics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1988.
- Hargrove, Eugene C. 1992. 'Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value', *The Monist*, **75**: 183–207.
- Harman, Gilbert 1975. 'Moral Relativism Defended', *Philosophical Review*, **84**: 3–22.
- Harman, Gilbert 1996. 'Moral Relativism', in Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell).

ROBIN ATTFIELD

- Hodgson, P.E. 1984. 'Philosophical Implications of Quantum Physics', *Proceedings of the Eighth International Wittgenstein Symposium (1983)*. Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky.
- Hodgson, Peter 1998. Review of D. Bohm and B.J. Hiley, *The Undivided Universe: An Ontological Interpretation of Quantum Theory*, *Zygon*, **33**: 485–7.
- Johnston, Mark 1989. 'Dispositional Theories of Value', *Aristotelian Society Proceedings*, Supp. Vol. LXIII: 139–174.
- Kim, Jaegwon 1984. 'Concepts of Supervenience', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, **45**: 153–176.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. 1983. 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', *The Philosophical Review*, **XCII**: 169–195.
- Lewis, David 1989. 'Dispositional Theories of Value', *Aristotelian Society Proceedings*, Supp. Vol. LXIII: 113–137.
- Mackie, John 1977. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Norton, Bryan G. 1992. 'Epistemology and Environmental Values', *The Monist*, **75**: 208–226.
- O'Neill, John 1991. *Worlds Without Content*. London: Routledge.
- O'Neill, John 1992. 'The Varieties of Intrinsic Value', *The Monist*, **75**: 119–137.
- O'Neill, John 1993. *Ecology, Policy and Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Preston, Christopher 1998. 'Epistemology and Intrinsic Values', *Environmental Ethics*, **20**: 409–428.
- Routley, Richard and Val Routley 1980. 'Human Chauvinism and Environmental Ethics', in Don Mannison, Michael McRobbie and Richard Routley (eds), *Environmental Philosophy*, pp. 96–189. Canberra: Department of Philosophy, Research School of the Social Sciences, Australian National University.
- Searle, John 1983. *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Michael 1989. 'Dispositional Theories of Value', *Aristotelian Society Proceedings*, Supp. Vol. LXIII: 89–111.
- Sterba, James P. 1998. *Justice for Here and Now*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weston, Antony 1985. 'Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics*, **7**: 321–339.
- Williams, Bernard 1972. *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wong, David 1984. *Moral Relativity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Zimmerman, Michael J. 1999. 'In Defense of the Concept of Intrinsic Value', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, **29**: 389–410.

[5]

Why Environmental Ethics Shouldn't Give Up on Intrinsic Value

Katie McShane*

Recent critics (Andrew Light, Bryan Norton, Anthony Weston, and Bruce Morito, among others) have argued that we should give up talk of intrinsic value in general and that of nature in particular. While earlier theorists might have overestimated the importance of intrinsic value, these recent critics underestimate its importance. Claims about a thing's intrinsic value are claims about the distinctive way in which we have reason to care about that thing. If we understand intrinsic value in this manner, we can capture the core claims that environmentalists want to make about nature while avoiding the worries raised by contemporary critics. Since the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value plays a critical role in our understanding of the different ways that we do and should care about things, moral psychology, ethical theory in general, and environmental ethics in particular shouldn't give up on the concept of intrinsic value.

Lately there have been calls within environmental ethics to abandon the concept of intrinsic value (roughly and preliminarily, the value a thing has in its own right), and there seems to be a growing consensus that this concept is unhelpful for thinking about how and why the natural environment should matter to us.¹ Andrew Light, Bruce Morito, Bryan Norton, and Anthony Weston, among others, have criticized discussions of intrinsic value for both assuming a flawed theory of value and distracting environmental ethicists from other more important issues.² Of course, there are many different views about what

* Department of Philosophy and Religion, North Carolina State University, Campus Box 8103, Raleigh, NC 27695-8103. McShane's primary research interests are in environmental ethics and ethical theory. She thanks Elizabeth Anderson, Arthur Applbaum, Karen Bennett, Alan Carter, Stephen Darwall, Patrick Frierson, Eugene C. Hargrove, P. J. Ivanhoe, Dale Jamieson, Jeff Kasser, Simon Keller, Scott McElreath, Doug McLean, Robert Mabrito, Kelly McShane, Lawrence H. Simon, and two anonymous referees, Susan Armstrong and Wayne Ouderkirk, for helpful comments and discussions, as well as audiences at Boston University's Karbank Symposium on Environmental Philosophy, Colby College's Environmental Studies Colloquium, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, at which earlier versions of this paper were presented.

¹ Throughout this paper I refer to the intrinsic value of "the natural environment" and "nature." Doing so is intended to be a concise way of saying something like "the nonhuman natural world and/or its parts," including nonhuman animals, plants, ecosystems, rock formations, and so on. In order to keep the focus on value theory in this paper, I do not discuss the issue of how, if at all, one should draw the distinction between the natural and the artifactual. Doing so is an important matter, however, and how one resolves it will have a significant impact on what one is saying (or not saying) when attributing intrinsic value to nature.

² See, e.g., Andrew Light, "Contemporary Environmental Ethics: From Metaethics to Public Philosophy," *Metaphilosophy* 33 (2002): 426-49; Bruce Morito, "Intrinsic Value: A Modern Albatross for the Ecological Approach," *Environmental Values* 12 (2003): 317-36; Bryan G. Norton, "Why I Am Not a Nonanthropocentrist: Callicott and the Failure of Monistic Inherentism,"

intrinsic value is, and the differences among them have made it difficult to judge the success or even the intended target of some of these critics. Nonetheless, the criticisms seem to have been fairly well received among environmental ethicists, and I suspect that those interested in or willing to defend claims about the intrinsic value of nature are rapidly declining in number.

My aim in this paper is to assess these criticisms as they have developed so far and offer a modest defense of the concept of intrinsic value, at least as I understand it. The paper proceeds in three parts. First, I survey the recent critiques and explain what problems the critics have claimed that the concept of intrinsic value brings with it. Next, I consider the various conceptions of intrinsic value invoked by environmental ethicists and outline the differences among them. Finally, I focus in on one of these conceptions and consider how damaging the recent criticisms are to it. Ultimately, I argue that if we think of intrinsic value claims as claims about the ways in which it makes sense for us to care about things, we can understand intrinsic value in such a way that it escapes contemporary criticisms and yet captures a conceptual distinction that, I argue, is indispensable to moral psychology, normative ethics in general, and environmental ethics in particular.

CRITICISMS OF THE CONCEPT OF INTRINSIC VALUE

There are three main lines of criticism that have been offered recently. First, as Bruce Morito and Anthony Weston have pointed out, the notion that things can possess value independently of the relations they have to other things suggests a peculiarly atomistic picture of the world.³ The more we learn about our world, the more we see it as made up of things that are interrelated, interdependent, and defined through their relations with other things. It would be strange, then, to see value as something that can somehow stand alone. It might be thought to be especially strange for those of us who work on environmental issues: we spend much of our time urging people to recognize the interdependence of the different parts of the natural world. How odd that we should be insisting on values that are independent.

As a way out of this problem, Weston suggests that we replace our old ideas about intrinsic value with a picture that "insists most centrally on the interrelatedness of our values[,] . . . a picture of values dynamically interdepending with other values and with beliefs, choices, and exemplars[,] . . . a kind of 'ecology' of values."⁴ In a similar spirit, Morito advocates understanding the

Environmental Ethics 17 (1995): 341–58; and Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," in *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 285–306.

³ See Morito, "Intrinsic Value: A Modern Albatross" and Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value."

⁴ Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value," p. 285.

world in terms of “interdependent values as a preparation for a more ecologically coherent approach to environmental protection.”⁵

The second worry is that believing in intrinsic value would commit us to a metaphysically elaborate (and therefore dubious) picture of the world. Bryan Norton claims that believing in intrinsic value involves believing that value can exist “prior to human conceptualization, prior to any worldview.”⁶ We might think, along with John Mackie, that such belief posits the existence of a very peculiar property indeed as part of the fabric of the universe.⁷ It is one thing to believe that water existed before conscious beings did; it is quite another to believe that value existed before conscious beings did. Furthermore, given that there is a more straightforward story to be told about how value gets into the world (namely, via valuers), it is not clear that there is good reason to believe that the property of value does inhere in the natural world intrinsically. The main target of this criticism seems to be the views of Holmes Rolston, III, who claims that for nature to be intrinsically valuable it has to be the case that the property of value, which is a natural property just as *being made of carbon* is a natural property, exists in the world independently of the existence of any conscious minds. On Rolston’s view, the world had value in it before we came along, and it will have value in it long after we are gone.⁸

The third worry is that, as many environmental pragmatists have recently

⁵ Morito, “Intrinsic Value: A Modern Albatross,” p. 317.

⁶ Bryan G. Norton, *Toward Unity among Environmentalists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 235. See also Bryan G. Norton, *Why Preserve Natural Variety?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 180–82; and J. Baird Callicott, “Rolston on Intrinsic Value: A Deconstruction,” *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): 129–43. For replies to these criticisms, see Christopher J. Preston, “Epistemology and Intrinsic Values: Norton and Callicott’s Critiques of Rolston,” *Environmental Ethics* 20 (1998): 409–28 and Robin Attfield, “Postmodernism, Value and Objectivity,” *Environmental Values* 10 (2001): 145–62. Norton claims that his worry is epistemological, since he believes that intrinsic value claims “cannot be supported by scientific or any other cultural resources—[they] must be supported independently of all experience” (p. 235). This is a puzzling explanation, however. One might well think that water exists in the world in a way that is prior to any human conceptualizations of water, but it does not follow from this that claims about the existence of water here or there must be justified independently of experience.

⁷ J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 38–42.

⁸ See, e.g., Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), and Holmes Rolston, III, “Are Values in Nature Subjective or Objective?” *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 125–51. Rolston’s view of intrinsic value is very similar in structure to the view of G. E. Moore. The main difference between them is that Moore believes that value is a nonnatural property and Rolston believes that it is a natural property. See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ed. Thomas Baldwin, 2d rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The similarity between these two views has not been lost on commentators—one often finds references to Moore in articles where people run this second line of criticism. In fact, one gets the distinct impression that Moore’s view is next in line behind Rolston’s on the critics’ list of “Bad Ways a Theory Could Turn Out.”

been contending, intrinsic value claims also seem to be unnecessary.⁹ We do not need to work up a theory of intrinsic value, they argue, to articulate the importance of the things we hold most dear. Every environmental policy or practical ethical recommendation we would want to defend using intrinsic value claims can be defended equally well using extrinsic value claims. We do not need to show that old-growth forests have intrinsic value to make the case that they should not be destroyed—we can do so just as well by showing the likely effects that destroying them would have on us and the things that we care about. Furthermore, there are good practical reasons for wanting to avoid intrinsic value claims if we can do so. First, as Light argues, the general public is not likely to be moved by claims about so-called intrinsic value in nature; they are much more likely to be moved by claims about contributions that the natural world makes to human well-being.¹⁰ Second, Norton worries that insisting on intrinsic value claims will make specialists in other fields (e.g., economics) uninterested in what environmental ethicists have to say, since one of the grounding assumptions of these fields is that all value is value-to-humans. This assumption precludes the possibility of intrinsic value, at least in the sense that these philosophers want to use it.¹¹ If the concept of intrinsic value is both unnecessary and making life hard for philosophers, then one might think that it is time for this concept to go the way of the mastodon.

KINDS OF INTRINSIC VALUE

To hear those who would know tell the tale, in the early days of environmental ethics, intrinsic value (and that of nature in particular) was the theoretical

⁹ See, e.g., Light, "Contemporary Environmental Ethics," Norton, *Toward Unity among Environmentalists*, and Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value." For an opposing view within environmental pragmatism, see Ben A. Minteer, "Intrinsic Value for Pragmatists?" *Environmental Ethics* 22 (2001): 57–75.

¹⁰ Light, "Contemporary Environmental Ethics," p. 427.

¹¹ See Norton, "Why I Am Not a Nonanthropocentrist," pp. 343–44, and Bryan G. Norton, "Integration or Reduction: Two Approaches to Environmental Values," in *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 121. The field of environmental economics has tried to overcome some of these problems in a different way, at least with respect to the gap between ethics and economics. In response to some of the claims made by environmentalists and environmental ethicists about nature's value, environmental economists have come up with different kinds of value that try to capture some nonanthropocentric intuitions. So they have introduced concepts such as existence value, bequest value, and even an economist-sanctioned version of the concept of intrinsic value. But I think that the results of these attempts have been decidedly mixed, at least so far. There is still widespread disagreement even among environmental economists about how to understand these concepts and whether to accept them at all. It is also not clear that these concepts can capture the intuitions they were meant to capture. See, e.g., Jonathan Aldred, "Existence Value, Welfare and Altruism," *Environmental Values* 3 (1994): 381–401, and Mark Sagoff, "Existence Value and Intrinsic Value," *Ecological Economics* 24 (1998): 163–68.

holy grail.¹² Everybody wanted to find a theory on which it would turn out that nature had intrinsic value—in fact, some claimed that to be an environmental ethic at all, a theory had to be able to attribute intrinsic value to nature.¹³ However, the use of the term *intrinsic value* in environmental ethics at that time was a lot like the use of the term *freedom* these days in American political discourse. It was used to designate something that everybody is in favor of, even though (and perhaps because) nobody is really sure what they mean by it. In environmental ethics, the term *intrinsic value* was used to refer to a number of very different ethical concepts. We can group them into roughly four categories:

- (1) Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of *X* are claims about the distinctive role that *X* should play in moral decision making.
- (2) Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of *X* are claims about the distinctive way that it makes sense to care about *X*.
- (3) Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of *X* are claims about which properties of *X* make it valuable.
- (4) Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of *X* are claims about the metaphysical status of *X*'s value properties.

Views of intrinsic value in the first group usually involve the claim that intrinsically valuable things are supposed to have a special kind of importance in moral decision making that other things do not have. According to some of these views, intrinsically valuable things are those that have moral standing—i.e., they are such that we must consider their interests when thinking about doing something that might affect them.¹⁴ According to others, intrinsically valuable things are independent sources of moral duties—i.e., they are such that we have duties to them, not just duties that somehow involve them.¹⁵ Still others involve the claim that intrinsic values are the kind of values that should outweigh, trump, or even silence other values in cases of conflict.¹⁶

¹² Norton, "Why I Am Not a Nonanthropocentrist," p. 343. See also Morito, "Intrinsic Value: A Modern Albatross."

¹³ See, e.g., Tom Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 19–20, and J. Baird Callicott, "Intrinsic Value in Nature: A Metaethical Analysis," in *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 241. Michael Soulé makes a similar point about the relationship of intrinsic value claims to conservation biology. See Michael E. Soulé, "What Is Conservation Biology?" *BioScience* 35 (1985): 731–32.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 193–31.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Karl F. Nordstrom, "Intrinsic Value and Landscape Evaluation," *Geographical Review* 83 (1993): 473–76.

Views of intrinsic value that fall into the second group are concerned with the different ways that we value things. They tend to contrast valuing things intrinsically, on the one hand, with valuing things instrumentally, as a means, or for the sake of some other thing, on the other hand. One most often sees the claim that to value something intrinsically is to value it for its own sake, and thus that for a thing to be intrinsically valuable is for it to be properly or appropriately valued for its own sake.¹⁷

Views that fall into the third group tend to involve the claim that for a thing to be intrinsically valuable is for it to be valuable in virtue of its intrinsic properties. Intrinsic properties are then understood as nonrelational properties, or perhaps more correctly “non-externally relational” properties.¹⁸ Thus, for an object to be intrinsically valuable is for it to be valuable in virtue of properties that aren’t a matter of relating it to something outside of itself. One also occasionally finds views in this third group involving the claim that for something to be intrinsically valuable is for it to be valuable in virtue of its essential nature—i.e., in virtue of its essential properties.¹⁹ It is not clear why one would want to call this kind of value *intrinsic value* rather than *essential value*, for not all essential properties are intrinsic properties.²⁰ But, in any case, people do call the value of a thing that is valuable in virtue of its essential nature a kind of intrinsic value, and this is another view of the third type.²¹

Views that fall into the fourth group are views about the metaphysical status of a thing’s value, and they can get fairly complex in their details. But roughly the idea is this: one of the things that we might be asking when we ask whether something has value in its own right is whether it would still have this value even if we were not around, even if no valuers were around, and/or even if it was the only thing that existed in the universe. If it would still have value under

¹⁷ See, e.g., Michael Lockwood, “End Value, Evaluation, and Natural Systems,” *Environmental Ethics* 18 (1996): 265–78.

¹⁸ For example, an intrinsic property of my left shoe is *having a rubber sole*; an extrinsic (i.e., externally relational) property of my left shoe is *being to the left of my right shoe*.

¹⁹ Essential properties are those that make a thing what it is. For example, four-sidedness would be an essential property of a square. If a figure did not have this property, it would not be a square.

²⁰ Here is an example of an essential property that is not an intrinsic property: it is a property that I possess, namely, *having my particular biological parents*. This is clearly a relation I have to something outside of myself, namely, to my parents, but it is also a property that makes me the thing that I am. If I did not have this property—that is to say, if I did not have my particular biological parents—I would not be me.

²¹ An example of this type of view is Christine Korsgaard’s. See Christine M. Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 249–74. She describes intrinsic value as unconditional value, but it is essential properties rather than intrinsic properties that are possessed by things unconditionally—i.e., in every possible world. For a further discussion of this point, see Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, “A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000): 33–51.

these circumstances, then its value must be intrinsic—i.e., its value must inhere in the thing itself rather than in a relation between the thing and something else. This way of thinking about how we should understand the intrinsicness of intrinsic value is part of the philosophical legacy of G. E. Moore—it is Moore's isolation test.²² The views that fall into this fourth group can be seen as attempts to square the talk of intrinsic value in ethics with the talk of intrinsic properties in metaphysics. They allow us to say that *being valuable* is a property of objects in a way similar to the way in which *being made of carbon* is a property of objects. They are both properties that do not depend on a relation that the object bears to something outside of itself, and thus they are both properties that the object would retain if everything outside of itself disappeared.

Of course, to categorize views into these four groups is not to say that a view cannot fall into more than one of them. Holmes Rolston's view of intrinsic value described earlier falls into groups (3) and (4); Tom Regan's view of inherent value falls into both (1) and (2); and so on. While relations between the groups certainly are not ones of logical entailment, it is true that adopting claims within one group can, especially in the presence of other theoretical elements, make claims within one or more of the other groups look very attractive.

AN ACCOUNT OF INTRINSIC VALUE

Although there is quite a bit to say about how the three criticisms mentioned above apply to each of these four versions of intrinsic value, that would require much more room than is available here. Instead, I intend to focus on the second version, the view that claims about a thing's intrinsic value are claims about how it makes sense for us to care about the thing. I think that this issue is really at the core of environmental ethicists' interest in intrinsic value. That is to say, I suspect that it is really an interest in accounting for nature's intrinsic value in this second sense that has led theorists to posit its intrinsic value in the other three senses. I discuss this point further below. First, however, let me do what I can to motivate two claims: (1) that we have good reason to want intrinsic value of this type in our conceptual repertoire, and (2) that it can make sense to attribute intrinsic value of this type to at least some parts of the natural world. In order to motivate these claims, it is useful first to get a rough idea of what an account of intrinsic value in this second sense might look like.

Let us take a step back for a moment and think about what *value* really is. Our attributions of value are closely tied to our practices of valuing. When we say that *X* is valuable, part of what we are saying is that *X* is the sort of thing that it makes sense to value. More precisely, we are saying that *X* merits or deserves

²² See Moore, *Principia Ethica*, pp. 142–47, 236–38.

to be valued by valuers.²³ This understanding of value is not new. An analysis of this type was defended by Franz Brentano and more recently by Elizabeth Anderson.²⁴ It does, however, seem to be currently experiencing a resurgence in popularity.²⁵

Of course, as many of the sentimentalists have pointed out, we rarely if ever just plain value things. Rather, we take some particular valuing attitude toward them—admiration, awe, respect, and so on. Corresponding to these particular valuing attitudes are particular kinds of value: admirability, awesomeness, respect-worthiness, etc. To say that *X* is valuable, then, is to say that *X* merits or deserves one or more of these particular valuing attitudes.²⁶

Among these particular valuing attitudes, some have a different structure than others. Some are what we might call intrinsic valuing attitudes—ways of valuing something for its own sake, or in its own right, while others are what we might call extrinsic valuing attitudes—ways of valuing something for the sake of some other valuable thing. Some philosophers have wanted to use the language of means and ends to describe this distinction, referring to intrinsic valuing attitudes as ways of valuing things as ends and extrinsic valuing attitudes as ways of valuing things as means. However, this language has caused a tremendous amount of confusion in the literature, particularly in the

²³ Here is the reason that the latter formulation is more precise: suppose we define *being admirable* just as “being the sort of thing it makes sense to admire.” The problem is that it can make sense to admire things for all sorts of reasons, some of which have nothing to do with the features that make a thing admirable. Suppose, for example, that my boss is particularly sensitive to the opinions that her employees have of her, and she systematically rewards those who admire her and fires those who do not. Suppose that I love my job, cannot find another, my boss is very good at detecting genuine admiration, and I am very bad at faking admiration. There is a very real sense in which she is someone it does make sense for me to admire—that is, if I know what is good for me—but this fact hardly makes her admirable. Circumstances can sometimes give us reasons to admire those who are not really admirable. But if we were to define *admirability* in terms of what it makes sense to admire, then my boss would meet this condition, and so she would turn out on this definition to be admirable. This is what has been referred to in the philosophical literature as the “Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem.” For a discussion, see Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson, “Sentiment and Value,” *Ethics* 110 (2000): 722–48, and Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, “The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-Attitudes and Value,” *Ethics* 114 (2004): 391–423; Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, “Buck-Passing and the Right Kind of Reasons,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 56 (2006): 114–20; Jonas Olson, “Buck-Passing and the Wrong Kind of Reasons,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2004): 295–300; and Philip Stratton-Lake, “How to Deal with Evil Demons: Comment on Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen,” *Ethics* 115 (2005): 788–98.

²⁴ Franz Brentano, *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, trans. Roderick Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Gerald F. Gaus, *Value and Justification: The Foundations of Liberal Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁵ See, e.g., D’Arms and Jacobson, “Sentiment and Value,” and Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, “The Strike of the Demon.”

²⁶ Elizabeth Anderson argues for a pluralism of just this type. See Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, chap. 1.

environmental ethics literature, in part because people tend to conflate two very different meanings of *means* and *ends*.

The first sense of *means* and *ends* comes from everyday speech, where we use the term *end* to denote a goal or an aim, and we use the term *means* to denote that which one uses to achieve a goal or an aim. When we say that something is a means to an end in this sense, we are claiming that it is useful for achieving a goal or an aim. Since, metaphysically speaking, a goal or an aim must be a state of affairs rather than, e.g., a concrete particular such as a person, only states of affairs can be ends in this first sense. (For example, I cannot take you as my goal, though I can take states of affairs involving you as my goal—e.g., that you exist or that you be happy). Thus, persons, trees, and other concrete particulars cannot be ends in this first sense. Means will not be as metaphysically limited, but the relation between means and ends will have to be a causal or at least potentially causal one, for to say that a means is used to achieve an end implies that the means is somehow causally efficacious in bringing about the end.²⁷ This first sense of *means and ends* has its natural home in discussions of deliberate actions—cases where we do or use something in order to achieve something else. It is this first sense of *means and ends* that we have in mind when we say such things as “The end justifies the means.”

In the second sense, *end* is used to describe something that has value in its own right (nonderivative value), and *means* is used to describe something that has value in virtue of a relation it has to some end (derivative value).²⁸ Understood in this second sense, an end could be a state of affairs, a concrete particular, an abstract object, a universal—whatever kind of thing it is that one thinks has value in its own right. A means will be anything that has value because of its relation to an end. Furthermore, unlike the case with the first sense, this relation need not be a causal one—it might be, for example, representational or symbolic. Thus, something like a memento would count as a means in this second sense but not in the first sense. A memento has value not because of what it does—not because it is used to achieve any goal or aim—but because of what it signifies or represents.²⁹ This second sense of *means and ends* is applicable even in cases where one is not acting in the pursuit of a goal. It is this sense of *ends and means* that is involved in Kant’s claim that we should never treat humanity as a mere means, but always as an end in itself.³⁰

These two senses have frequently been confused with each other, and

²⁷ See Thomas Carson, “Happiness and the Good Life,” *Southwest Journal of Philosophy* 9 (1978): 75.

²⁸ Cf. Dale Jamieson, “Values in Nature,” in *Morality’s Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 225–43. The way I am using the term *derivative* here is different from the way that Jamieson uses it.

²⁹ This example is from Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, p. 3.

³⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 39–108.

features of one have been incorrectly taken to apply to the other. For example, some environmental ethicists have assumed that all derivative value (second sense) must be instrumental value (first sense), argued that the value of non-human nature goes beyond its mere usefulness for achieving our ends (first sense), and concluded that nature's value must be nonderivative (second sense).³¹ Others have assumed that to be derivatively valuable (second sense) a thing must have some causal connection to our goals or aims (first sense), and for this reason they have worried about whether a thing can have any value at all if there is nothing it can do for us.³² Although philosophers have made some progress recently in sorting out these confusions, there is still more work to be done.³³ For this reason, I think it is better to avoid talk of *means and ends* entirely.

An example of an attitude that I think, at least in many of its forms, is an intrinsically valuing attitude is the attitude of love. Part of what it is to love something is to value it as a good in itself.³⁴ If I say that I love you, but then claim that your only value is that you remind me of somebody else, you will probably be skeptical that what I'm feeling for you is really love. Your skepticism is understandable, for loving something is a way of valuing that thing in its own right. Love involves seeing the object of love as having worth independently of the value of other things that you (and others) care about. Another way of putting this point is to say that the source of value is the loved thing, rather than, for example, our relationship with it, the way it makes us feel, the states of affairs that include it, etc. To love something is to make *it* a primary object of your concern. If I genuinely love you, what I value is *you*, not the joy you bring to my life, the person you inspire me to be, the experience of friendship you

³¹ See, e.g., J. Baird Callicott, "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984): 299–309, and Joseph R. Des Jardins, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1997), pp. 127–30. For slightly different criticisms of this type of reasoning, see John O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75 (1992): 119–37, and Karen Green, "Two Distinctions in Environmental Goodness," *Environmental Values* 5 (1996): 31–46.

³² See, e.g., Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984): 131–48.

³³ For examples of the progress, see Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness," and Shelly Kagan, "Rethinking Intrinsic Value," *Journal of Ethics* 2 (1992): 277–97. For a description of some of the work still to be done, see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, "A Distinction in Value."

³⁴ Cf. J. David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109 (1999): 338–74. Of course, the English word *love* probably refers to a number of different attitudes. The sense in which I love my parents, the Red Sox, or true crime stories might all be quite different. The remarks about love here should be taken to be limited to the kind of love one feels for friends, family, or romantic partners. It is this kind of love that is a form of intrinsic valuation, and it is this kind that environmentalists think people can, do, and should take toward parts of the natural environment. Thanks to Simon Keller for urging the importance of this point.

allow me to have, etc. To be sure, I probably value these things too; loving relationships often bring with them many benefits. But these values are secondary—they do not constitute the love, but are rather added to it.

All this is to say that love has a certain structure, a structure that looks an awfully lot like intrinsic valuation. But love is not the only attitude that works this way. Respect, and (at least in some manifestations) reverence and awe also seem to have a similar structure. To respect something is in part to treat it as having a kind of importance in its own right; to be in awe of something is in part to treat it as having a kind of greatness in its own right, to revere something is in part to treat it as having a kind of dignity or nobility in its own right. One reason that we might find the concept of intrinsic value useful then is that we seem to do a lot of intrinsic valuing.³⁵

But it is not just that we *happen* to value some things intrinsically and other things extrinsically—this is not merely an interesting little fact about human psychology. (After all, you might think, there are many quirks about human psychology of which ethics does not need to take account.) On the contrary, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic valuation plays an important role in ethics, and rightly so. We think that some things should be valued intrinsically and other things should be valued extrinsically. While these judgments will usually be context dependent, they are nonetheless very important in our thinking about what to do and how to feel. For an example, consider the case of Ebenezer Scrooge, the character from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.³⁶ What was Scrooge's moral mistake? His mistake was that he valued money intrinsically and he valued people extrinsically (instrumentally, in fact).³⁷ He got it backwards. *People* are supposed to be valued intrinsically and *money* is supposed to be valued extrinsically. In fact, that is the whole point of the morality tale—and it has a happy ending because Scrooge finally figures out his mistake and gets it right. But Scrooge is not that uncommon: many of our morality tales are about people who care about the wrong things in the wrong ways and how they do or do not fix this mistake.

On this picture, what would we lose if we were to give up on the idea of intrinsic value? If we were to agree with those who say that nothing could have intrinsic value, then none of these kinds of intrinsic valuation could be warranted in the sense that none of them could be merited by their objects. If loving something involves thinking of it as having value in its own right, then if nothing *does* have value in its own right, loving things would involve a kind

³⁵ See Minter, "Intrinsic Value for Pragmatists?" for a similar claim.

³⁶ See Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003).

³⁷ That Scrooge is unfriendly and a miser is well known, but the text also provides glimpses of his attitudes toward human relationships in general: "Why did you get married?" said Scrooge. 'Because I fell in love.' 'Because you fell in love!' growled Scrooge, as if that were the only thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas" (ibid., p. 43).

of mistake.³⁸ It would be like believing propositions we know to be false: we would be thinking of the object as having a kind of value that we know it does not really have. What we lose, then, in giving up the concept of intrinsic value, is the prospect of an ethics that can accept the structure of many of our most common valuing attitudes, rather than treating them as mere mistakes.

In fact, I would argue that it is this connection between the kind of value people think something has and attitudes they think it makes sense to take toward it that largely explains the interest in the concept of intrinsic value from environmental ethicists. The idea, I think, is this: we can, do, and should take some of the same intrinsically valuing attitudes toward things in the nonhuman natural world that we do toward things in the human world. We can, do, and should at least sometimes think of some parts of the natural world as appropriate objects of awe, reverence, respect, and love. We should not reserve this role in our emotional lives for humans alone.

In reading through the environmentalist literature (not the environmental ethics literature, but something more like what bookstores call "nature writing"), one sees writers making this claim over and over again. Aldo Leopold tells his readers that he is in love with pine trees, and he argues that people need to learn how to feel "love, respect and admiration for the land."³⁹ Willa Cather also speaks of love that people have for the land.⁴⁰ David James Duncan explains how he fell "heart over head in love" with the Blackfoot River, and then describes the grieving process he went through after deforestation of surrounding areas filled it with silt, destroying much of the ecosystem.⁴¹ John Fowles and John Muir compare the awe, wonder, and reverence that nature inspires to that which cathedrals and temples are meant to inspire. Fowles even goes so far as to claim, ". . . I am certain that all sacred buildings, from the greatest cathedral to the smallest chapel, and in all religions, derive from the natural aura of certain woodland or forest settings. In them we stand among older, larger, and infinitely other beings, remoter from us than the most bizarre other nonhuman forms of life: blind, immobile, speechless . . . , waiting. . . ." ⁴² The list goes on and on. Edward Hoagland, Carl Pope, Barry Lopez, Rachel Carson,

³⁸ It would not involve a mistake from the perspective of prudence or from the perspective of what one has reason to do generally. After all, one might have a prudential interest in loving things, and prudential reasons are relevant to what one should or should not do. Rather, it would involve a mistake from the perspective of value, where the question is not how one should behave generally but what behavior is merited by the object of valuation. Reasons seen from the perspective of value are reasons for action/attitude, but they are only *prima facie* reasons and not even the only kind of those.

³⁹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), pp. 74, 261.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 39, 169.

⁴¹ David James Duncan, "The War for Norman's River," *Sierra* 83, no. 3 (1998): 49.

⁴² John Fowles, *The Tree* (New York: Ecco Press, 1983), p. 58. See also John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 49.

Wallace Stegner, and many others all describe various intrinsic valuing attitudes that they take toward parts of the natural environment and urge these attitudes upon their readers.

That these attitudes are important for the purposes of ethics is also made clear. Leopold claims, "That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics."⁴³ Notice that he does not say "that the land is to be preserved" or "that the land is to be managed wisely"—he says that the land is to be loved and respected. This same sentiment is behind Dale Jamieson's claim that "the environmental problems that we face today are not fundamentally scientific problems. In large part the environmental crisis is a crisis of the human heart."⁴⁴

In fact, part of what I think many environmentalists find offensive about purely economic assessments of the value of nature is that even if they give us the right answer about how much to value the natural world, they give us the wrong answer about how to value the natural world.⁴⁵ The fact is, we care about economic goods in particular ways, and those ways of caring are not appropriate for every other thing about which we care. If you were to ask me how much the friendships I have are worth to me in dollar terms—for example, by asking how much I would pay to keep a friendship, or how much you would have to pay me to be willing to give up a friendship—I would have no answer for you, not because my friendships have infinite value to me or because they have no value at all, but rather because you are asking me to extend an economic mode of valuation to an area where it is not appropriate.

There is, of course, a slight disanalogy here, for I do not think environmentalists object to all economic assessments of environmental value in the way that I would with the value of my friends. They just object to the claim that this is the only mode of valuation that is appropriate to the natural world. Furthermore, to stick up for economists a bit here, I do not know of any economists who claim that economic modes of valuation are the only legitimate modes of valuation.⁴⁶ If policy makers only solicit assessments from economists, and if economists' particular specialty is coming up with economic assessments, then it is not the economists' fault if nature's value only gets assessed in economic terms. It is the policy makers' fault for only asking for economic assessments, and it is our fault—both for not finding ways to be more articulate about these

⁴³ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River*, p. xix.

⁴⁴ Dale Jamieson, "Ecosystem Health: Some Preventive Medicine," *Environmental Values* 4 (1995): 342.

⁴⁵ See Mark Sagoff, "Zuckerman's Dilemma: A Plea for Environmental Ethics," *Hastings Center Report* 21 (1991): 32–40, and Jamieson, "Values in Nature," pp. 237–38, for similar claims.

⁴⁶ Although, as Dale Jamieson has pointed out (in personal correspondence), "many economists are quite skeptical about the sorts of non-quantifiable values [described above] and many more would say that such values, if they exist, are like religious values and should not be taken into account when making public policy."

other kinds of value that we think nature has, and for not demanding that our policy makers include these sorts of values in their decision-making processes.

It is worth noting that what I described above is a very pluralistic theory of value. It recognizes that there are different kinds of value, not just different amounts of value, and among those different kinds are intrinsic and extrinsic value. But it also offers us a pluralistic conception of *intrinsic* value, for there are different kinds of that as well. Something could be intrinsically valuable in virtue of being awesome, or in virtue of being loveable, or in virtue of meriting any intrinsically valuing attitude. To know that something is intrinsically valuable, on this type of view, is not really to know all that much. We need to know in what way it is intrinsically valuable.

This pluralism makes good sense, for the way it is appropriate to treat the proper objects of different kinds of intrinsic valuation are quite different. Consider the difference between the ways that it is appropriate to treat the proper objects of awe, on the one hand, and the proper objects of love, on the other hand. You might want to say that both the Mona Lisa and your daughter have intrinsic value, the artwork because it is the appropriate object of awe and the child because she is the appropriate object of love. But the ways that it is appropriate to treat them will be quite different. It might be appropriate to put the Mona Lisa in a big plastic cage to protect it from flashbulbs and treat it with various chemicals in order to ensure that it changes as little as possible over time. But to lock your daughter away and carefully control the environment in an attempt to prevent her from changing in any way would be terrible. You should nurture her, help her to develop and change over time, and try to make it so that she changes in good ways rather than bad ones. But taking this strategy of benevolent improvement with the Mona Lisa would be a disaster. The Mona Lisa probably would look better in a nice hat, but you should not add one, even if the hat would constitute an aesthetic improvement.

To conclude this section, then, I think that in order to have an adequate moral psychology, we need to be able to account for the difference between valuing things intrinsically and valuing them extrinsically. In order to have an adequate ethical theory, we need to be able to say something about when these ways of valuing are or are not appropriate. That is to say, we need to be able to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic value. If we were to give up the concept of intrinsic value, we would have no way to make such a distinction.

CRITICISMS REVISITED

But what about the objections mentioned earlier? Let us consider how each of them may or may not apply to the version of intrinsic value I have just described. First, consider the worry about atomism. Morito claims, “‘Intrinsic value’ is . . . a concept born in the Western intellectual tradition for purposes of insulating and isolating those to whom intrinsic value can be attributed from

one another and their environmental context.”⁴⁷ Weston claims that instead of thinking that the world could contain individual bearers of intrinsic value, we should prefer “an understanding of values themselves as dynamically interdependent systems such that we could almost speak of an ‘ecology’ of value.”⁴⁸ I think we need to distinguish between strong and weak versions of the worry that has been articulated here. On the strong version, it is a problem if a theory individuates things at all. Of course, while it is true that some deep ecologists seem to make this claim (for example, Warwick Fox has said that “to the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness”⁴⁹), I think this view is a nonstarter. For whatever reason, our cognitive apparatus is such that we do individuate objects in our world—we think of the world as containing separate things, even as we notice all of the relations among these things. In fact, as any expert in childhood development can attest, individuation of objects in the world is one of the first tasks that our minds begin to perform—well before we acquire language.⁵⁰ Even for the critics’ theoretical purposes we would have to individuate things, for in order to have relations at all there must be *relata* (the things that are related by the relations). It does not make sense to talk about relations unless we can acknowledge that there are things being related. Our attitudes toward and ways of caring about the world, as well as our ethical relationships, also often require us to separate out individual things from the rest of the mass of stuff we encounter. I have to understand myself as separate from you in order to love or hate you; I need to know which parts of the world *you* refers to in order to resent you or feel guilty about how I treated you. I also need to individuate the *you* parts of the world in order to think that I have ethical obligations toward you. The kinds of conceptual separations required by these modes of thinking are not contrary to an “ecological world view” that notices and values systems, processes, and relationships. Rather, this is the type of thinking needed to make sense of these systems, processes, and relationships—that there are things that make up systems, go through processes, and enter into relationships with other things. To allow this much is not to adopt an atomistic view of the world—or if it is, then atomism is not always a bad thing.

But there is a weaker version of this worry, which is where I think this first criticism really has its force. It is not that every form of individuation is bad,

⁴⁷ Morito, “Intrinsic Value: A Modern Albatross,” p. 317.

⁴⁸ Anthony Weston, “Unfair to Swamps: A Reply to Katz,” in *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 319.

⁴⁹ Warwick Fox, “Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?” *The Ecologist* 14 (1984): 201–04, quoted in Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 1985), p. 66.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., David H. Rakison and Lisa M. Oakes, eds., *Early Category and Concept Development: Making Sense of the Blooming, Buzzing Confusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

the critic might argue, but rather that a theory that tells us to understand the world by dividing it up into individuals and then looking at the properties of these individuals will tend to miss the importance of relations, systems, processes, etc. It could miss them because the theory makes individuation and analysis the only mode of understanding phenomena, or it could do so because the theory makes individuation and analysis the primary mode of understanding phenomena. In any case, the worry is that by emphasizing the role of the individual in our understanding of the world, we will tend to miss the importance of these other things.⁵¹

In ethics and political philosophy, versions of this sort of criticism have been around for a long time. For example, many have criticized ethical views that try to decide moral questions simply by looking at who has a right to what.⁵² The worry is that when we make moral decisions in this manner, we tend to ignore many other morally important aspects of the situations we face. (If you doubt whether this is true, just look at some of the bizarre arguments that come out of the U.S. legal system, where many decisions do have to get made this way.)

However, this criticism only has force against the view I have just described to the extent that this view is telling us to treat intrinsic value as though it were the most important or perhaps the only important kind of value. But nothing in the view says that, and for good reason. Not even the strongest supporters of intrinsic value think it is the only kind of value there is.⁵³ There are also all sorts of extrinsic values, and in any given case the extrinsic considerations might turn out to be a lot more important than the intrinsic ones. To borrow an example of Jamieson's, you might rightly value the thread by which you are hanging thousands of feet above a river a lot more than you value your stamp collection, even though you value the former extrinsically and the latter intrinsically.⁵⁴ This example might strike some opponents of intrinsic value as odd, but the reason it is true is that *intrinsic value* does not mean *absolute value*. There is nothing about the concept of intrinsic value as described above that says intrinsic values are always more important than extrinsic values, or that they can never be outweighed by other considerations, or that possessing intrinsic value makes a thing inviolable. In order to make these claims, we would have to join the view just laid out with some view from the first group

⁵¹ This seems to be Norton's reasoning—see Bryan G. Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 183.

⁵² See, e.g., Onora O'Neill, "Children's Rights and Children's Lives," *Ethics* 98 (1988): 445–63.

⁵³ Technically, one exception to this view might be found among those who claim that to be extrinsically valuable is not really to have a kind of value, but rather to be instrumental in producing value. But this is only technically an exception, for such people think that there is good reason to care quite a bit about these instruments. Thus, the fact that extrinsic value is not really a kind of value on this view does not mean that one should not care about it.

⁵⁴ Jamieson, "Values in Nature," p. 236.

(that is to say, a view about the role that intrinsically valuable things should play in our moral decision making), and with a particularly simple-minded view at that.

Once we give up the idea that believing in intrinsic value means holding some sort of hyper-atomistic picture of the world on which the only thing that matters for the purposes of ethics is what each individual thing is like in its own right, there is less reason to be disturbed by the claim that our deeply interconnected world contains things that deserve to be intrinsically valued. Nothing in our world exists in isolation and there is no reason that we should want to think of things just as isolated individuals for the purposes of ethics. We might well agree that extrinsic values have been underappreciated and that the ultimate value of things will always depend on their relationships to other things. But we can do so while insisting that some things are worth caring about in their own right.

Weston, Morito, and Norton are right that we need to do a much better job than we have done, particularly in environmental ethics, of describing extrinsic values—not only the extent and the rich variety of such values, but also their importance for many of the moral decisions that we need to make. But the way to solve this problem is not to give up on the idea of intrinsic value altogether. If there is a problem of emphasis, then we should change our emphasis. But to give up on the idea of intrinsic value entirely would only generate a new set of problems.

As for the second criticism, the view just described avoids the dubious metaphysical claims about which Norton and others are worried, perhaps because it does not take a stand on the metaphysical status of ethical norms at all. There is nothing about intrinsic value of this second type that commits us to taking any position, much less a wildly implausible position, on these matters. If for something to have value is for it to be such that it merits certain sorts of treatment—both attitudes and actions—from valuers, then it is an open question whether anything could have value in a world where there were no valuers. We might want to say no—for how could an object merit a certain kind of treatment from beings that do not exist? Or we might want to say yes—claiming that all this would mean is that should any valuers come along, they would have reason to treat the object in this way. But which way we would go on this matter is an open question—there is nothing about things meriting intrinsic valuation that commits us to going either way.⁵⁵

The response to the third criticism is probably clear by this point. Even if it

⁵⁵ This second criticism, I think, really applies better to views within the fourth group—views on which claims about intrinsic value are claims about the metaphysical status of value. Rolston's view in particular seems to invite such worries. But the rest of us need not mean what Rolston means by *intrinsic value*. If we do not, our conception of intrinsic value need not be subject to the metaphysical worry.

were true that considerations of extrinsic value could justify the same policies as considerations of intrinsic value, they still would not be able to justify taking the same attitudes. That is to say, they would not say that it makes sense to care about things in the same way. But, of course, ethics is not just a matter of figuring out which public policies we ought to adopt, and so getting the right answer on that score is not the only task of a theory.⁵⁶ We want theories that can help us make sense of the world in more ways than this—we want theories that can help us figure out how to think and feel about the different parts of the world in which we live. Even if they would recommend the same policy choices, then, if the two theories endorse different attitudes—if, for example, one says it is appropriate to love the Rocky Mountains and the other says it is a kind of mistake to do so—this is a difference about which we still have reason to care.

Some environmental pragmatists have seen this worry and have argued that even if nature is only valuable insofar as it serves our needs, we can still say that people ought to value nature intrinsically.⁵⁷ Why? Because valuing nature intrinsically is good for us—doing so meets a deep-rooted human psychological need. So the claim is that the act of intrinsically valuing nature has extrinsic value. We should intrinsically value nature because it benefits us to do so.

I think, however, that this reply will not work. It is one thing to say that you ought to be in awe of something because it is great in some way that makes this response of yours appropriate—i.e., because it has whatever properties qualify a thing as being an appropriate object of awe.⁵⁸ But it is another thing to say that you ought to be in awe of something because I will give you five dollars if you can do it. To say the first is to make a straightforward value claim—a claim about which objects in the world merit which attitudes from valuers. But to say the second is to ask you to engage in an act of self-deception, or at least hypocrisy, though one that will make you better off. It says that you should adopt the attitude of awe toward something even though it clearly does not merit that awe.⁵⁹ That is to say, it asks you to value something that is not

⁵⁶ Cf. Norton, *Sustainability*, p. 151: “Because our approach is *practical*, the contexts sought for learning about theory and testing various linguistic formulations is to be sought ‘in the trenches’ of *policy and management*. . . .”

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Norton, “Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism.” Ben Minteer (“Intrinsic Value for Pragmatists?”) argues along similar lines, claiming that “noninstrumental value claims are often powerful tools for achieving widely endorsed public environmental goals” (p. 75).

⁵⁸ Although there is not room to do so here, a complete theory of this type will have to say something, for every particular valuing attitude, about which properties these might be. It will not do simply to say, for example, that the something merits awe because it is awesome—this would leave one with a circular explanation.

⁵⁹ Thus, I agree with Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, “The Strike of the Demon,” and D’Arms and Jacobson, “Sentiment and Value,” that we can have prudential reasons for adopting attitudes that are not otherwise warranted; it is not the case that we merely have prudential reasons for wanting to or trying to adopt them.

valuable. It asks you to treat something as though it had a kind of value that you know (at least if you have read your environmental pragmatism lately) that it does not have. Thus, not only does the environmental pragmatist view require a kind of double-consciousness from the point of view of the theoretically enlightened agent, it also presents a picture on which nature does not really merit the treatment that we ought, prudentially, to give it. Thus, while the environmental pragmatist can tell us to value nature intrinsically, he or she cannot say that nature merits intrinsic valuation. As a result, the environmental pragmatist is left with the claim that to treat nature as though it were intrinsically valuable is to make a kind of mistake, though one that it generally benefits us to make. I think that the theoretical approach I sketched above can do better.

In sum, the view of intrinsic value described here is able to avoid treating our attitudes of intrinsic valuation as mistaken just in virtue of the form they take, and for this reason, it allows us a moral psychology that is both familiar and realistic. This conclusion should be no surprise, since it is explicitly formulated to describe the norms that govern this particular moral-psychological type. For this reason, then, I think that environmental ethics should not give up on intrinsic value; nor should any other branch of ethics. It is a concept that plays a critical role in understanding the different ways that we do care about things, and it has a useful role to play in helping us think about the ways we should care about things.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[6]

Nature - every last drop¹ of it - is good

by Alan Holland

Introduction

Even friends of the natural world seem to feel obliged to deny the unqualified claim that nature is good: "It will not do to argue that what is natural is necessarily of value", writes Robert Elliot²; and Holmes Rolston exhibits similar misgivings³. The question I wish to raise is whether such reticence is warranted. The answer I wish to propose is that the claim can be upheld, provided that it is understood in a sense which is both contingent and conditional. The character of this contingency and conditionality will be explained in due course.

Before embarking on the defence of this position, there is one important disclaimer to be made. A defence of the claim that nature is good, in a sense which is both contingent and conditional, in no way precludes the possibility that many of nature's creatures, and perhaps other components or features of the natural world, make claims upon us which are unconditional. In addition to, and without prejudice to, anything being argued here, for example, it can be held that we have an unconditional moral obligation not to inflict gratuitous suffering on any sentient creature. Although the two notions are often lumped together in the environmental philosophy literature under the heading of 'value', or 'intrinsic value', the notion under consideration here is that of being 'good' or 'worthwhile', rather than that of being 'morally considerable'.

I

We must begin by establishing how the claim that nature is good (and similar such claims - 'life is good', 'life has value', and so forth) is to be understood. Here, we

¹ Needless to say, 'drop' is a figure of speech rather than a plug for 'aquacentrism'. All natural phenomena are to be understood as included - slivers, beams, sods, chunks and gusts, as well as the whole gamut of flora and fauna.

² "Faking Nature", *Inquiry* 25, 1982, p. 86.

³ "Can and Ought We to Follow Nature?", *Environmental Ethics* 1, 1979, p. 28: "I do not find nature meaningful everywhere, or beautiful, or valuable....".

shall distinguish between two possible interpretations of the claim. The first is to read it as

- (a) a universally quantified claim, which is being affirmed as
- (b) a conceptual truth.

When, for example, in his critique of Arne Naess's 'deep ecology' platform⁴, Richard Watson suggests that the principle 'life has value' derives from the more general principle that 'whatever is, is good', he seems to be construing the claim in this way, (and proceeds to denounce it roundly⁵). I say that he is construing the claim in a universally quantified sense because of his use of the term 'whatever'. That is to say, he is construing it as the claim that *whatever a thing is like*, if it exists, or is alive, or is natural, then it is good. And further, he seems to be construing it as the conceptual claim that something is good simply *by virtue of* its existing, or being alive, or being natural, i.e. that a thing's goodness follows from its having the property of existing, being alive, or being natural. Robert Elliot's insertion of 'necessarily', in his previously quoted reference to the argument that 'what is natural is necessarily of value', suggests that he holds to a similar interpretation.

It might be supposed that there are several potentially unwelcome consequences which follow from affirming the goodness of nature. In order to forestall at least some of these objections, therefore, it is important to appreciate just what does, and what does not, follow from the statement that nature is good, given the interpretation just outlined. Let us for a moment grant that it is *logically* possible that nature might have been otherwise than it has been, is, or is going to be, even though the implications of such far-reaching counterfactual claims are often unclear. Let us for the moment, in other words, allow sense to the claim that there are possible natural worlds other than the actual one. This may mean allowing not just possible worlds in which different contingencies obtain while existing natural laws remain the same, but also worlds in

⁴ "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary", *Inquiry* 16, 1973, p. 95.

⁵ "Eco-ethics: Challenging the Underlying Dogmas of Environmentalism", *Whole Earth Review* March 1985, p. 6.

which the natural laws themselves and therefore also what constitutes those worlds, are different⁶. Now, the first thing to observe is that to say whatever form nature takes, it is good, is not to say that

i) all possible natural worlds are equally good,

since, clearly, to say that A is good is not to say that B might not be better.

Nor, therefore, is it to imply that

ii) there could not be a world better than the existing one⁷.

Furthermore, and as a corollary of these first two points, it does not imply that

iii) human modification of nature is bad

or that

iv) natural processes are always and everywhere to be preferred to humanly modified ones.

So, although all of the propositions i-iv might be thought somewhat unappealing propositions to have to maintain, none of them in fact follows from the claim that nature is good, as we are interpreting it. What this claim does imply, on the other hand, is that, since natural processes are good, then any proposed human modification of the natural world needs to be justified if it is to be regarded as a change 'for the better'.

However, what the claim would also commit us to is the view that

v) *whatever* form nature took, it would, so far, be good.

And it is far from clear that we should want to be committed to this claim. For if we allow possible natural worlds other than the actual one, it would seem not impossible⁸ for there to be a world which was, quite literally, 'hell on earth' - the type of world represented, for example, in various medieval depictions of hell, in which there was more suffering than one might think endurable. In view of this particular unwelcome consequence, therefore, it is reasonable, I believe, to reject the claim that nature is

⁶ There are some perplexing issues here, whose discussion is beyond the ambitions of this paper.

⁷ This implication *would* arise if the claim that nature is good were being defended on the grounds that it is the work of a supreme and perfect supernatural being. But it is not.

⁸ However, I suspect that it would be far more difficult to describe such a world than one might at first imagine. Most actual medieval depictions of hell are probably incoherent, conceptually or even pictorially akin to the pictures of Escher.

good, if what is meant by this is that nature, *whatever it is like*, is good. And there are other reasons, too, for rejecting the claim understood in this sense: at least, it raises problems which one might think it better to avoid. For example, it seems that we would also be committed to the view that

vi) a thing's being natural entails that it is good.

Assuming that a naturalistic account of 'being natural' could be given, this would seem to be a paradigmatic example of the naturalistic 'fallacy' - the attempt to deduce an evaluative property from a purely naturalistic description. And aside from this formal criticism, there would arise the challenge actually to produce an account of 'being natural' from which an ascription of goodness could plausibly be derived.

II

There is, however, an alternative way to read the claim that nature is good. Instead of construing 'nature' as a universally quantified subject of a conceptual claim, we can construe it as 'rigidly designating' the subject of a normative claim. On this reading, 'nature' would not refer to whatever could possibly come about by natural processes, but only to the particular historical nature which has actually come about. In other words, 'nature' would not designate whatever could possibly satisfy the description 'natural'; instead, it would be the name of an individual. This might not come as such a surprising interpretation if we bear in mind that biologists themselves have long been urging a similar point, on conceptual grounds, in connection with certain components of the natural world, most notably species⁹. Indeed, the very same kinds of conceptual grounds which are used to support the contention that species are individuals rather than classes - for example, that they have a beginning in time and can become extinct, would also support the contention that nature is a particular occurrence rather than a kind of occurrence. For example, concerns about 'irreversibilities', and about the 'loss' of biodiversity, seem to presuppose a conception of the natural world - insofar as it is a

⁹ See, for example, David Hull "A Matter of Individuality", *Philosophy of Science* 45, 1978: 335-360, and Ernst Mayr "The Ontological Status of Species", *Biology and Philosophy* 2, 1987: 145-166.

5

subject of concern - as a unique, rather than a recurrent phenomenon. One can lose a (particular) safety pin, but not the kind - 'safety pin'.

If the claim that nature is good is no longer understood as a universal conceptual claim, but as a normative claim about an individual, then we shall avoid two of the difficulties mentioned earlier as attaching to the claim, namely:

- a) the charge of perpetrating the naturalistic fallacy, and
- b) the charge of implying an implausible consequence.

However, even if we abandon this 'conceptual' interpretation, and its accompanying attempt to deduce the property of goodness from the characteristic of being natural, in favour of the 'normative' interpretation, we still need to supply, and as a matter of some urgency:

- c) a basis for making the normative claim.

But, before attempting to make good this deficiency, we need to deal with two other difficulties which attach to any affirmation of nature's goodness, and which still remain for the version of the position now being advanced.

III

The first is suggested by Robert Elliot, when he gives his reason for saying that "it will not do to argue that what is natural is necessarily of value". The reason he gives is that it is open to simple counter-examples; thus, sickness and disease are natural but are not necessarily good. Much more of the same kind of point is, of course, to be found in Mill's 'Essay on Nature', which argues in graphic fashion that "In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are nature's every day performances"¹⁰. On Mill's view, nature is an amoral force, indifferent to the suffering of its creatures.

¹⁰ J. S. Mill, "Nature", in *Three Essays on Religion* (Longman 1874), p. 28.

6

There are two replies to this criticism. The first is an ad hominem reply to Elliot which, as it happens, involves appealing to another remark of Mill's, also to be found in the 'Essay on Nature'. It arises out of the fact that Elliot - and here he represents the views of a number of environmental philosophers - does find value in quite a lot of the natural world, though not, apparently, in sickness and disease; moreover he finds this value present in natural things not accidentally, but by virtue of their naturalness. The question arises whether such a stance is coherent. The difficulty is to see how there can possibly be grounds for discrimination: for, as Mill observes: "If it is a sufficient reason for doing one thing, that nature does it, why not another thing? If not all things, why anything?"¹¹. Although Elliot's concern is with valuing, rather than following, nature, the question still arises why sickness and disease are not valued, at least insofar as they are natural, if many other things are valued, and valued for their naturalness.

The second reply is that neither Elliot nor Mill acknowledges the distinction between being good for, and being good, period. For if this distinction is recognised then it is quite unacceptable to argue from the premise that some natural processes are not good for humans, or for other sentient creatures, to the conclusion that these processes are not good, period. It is a simple *non sequitur*.

IV

This reply could be met with a simple denial that any non-relative notion of the good makes sense. This is the position taken by Philippa Foot, among others¹². But such a position might seem hard to maintain. Consider, for example, the question of how we are to construe the fairly widely held view that the gratuitous infliction of suffering is bad. The most plausible reading is surely to construe it in a non-relative rather than a relative sense. We do not just mean that suffering is bad for the sufferer. For if we did, then to say that it is bad for someone to suffer (gratuitously) would not be to give a reason for the speaker, or for anyone other than the sufferer, to do anything about it.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹² In "Utilitarianism and the Virtues", *Mind* 1985: 196-209.

Yet that is precisely what such a remark is supposed to do. We may recognise that our judgement is made *from a point of view*; but nevertheless, what we mean to claim, from that point of view, is that such a situation is bad, period. Or again, consider our recourse to the remark that we, or another, or someone, ought to do such and such. This is tantamount to the claim that it would be a good thing if we, another, or someone did that thing. And again, we do not seem to mean that it would be good for us, the other, or someone. Nor do we simply mean that it would be good from our point of view. What we mean to claim, admittedly from our point of view, is that the thing just ought to be done.

It is possible that the inclination to deny that there can be a non-relative sense of 'good' rests on a failure to distinguish between two different sorts of relativity which may be involved in connection with assertions of goodness and badness - the relativity of perspective (or point of view) and the relativity of interest. Thus, it may well be true that any judgement that a thing is good or bad presupposes a point of view or perspective from which the judgement is made. This is not being denied. But from this fact it does not follow that any judgement that a thing is good or bad is a judgement that it is good or bad for some interested being, i.e., that it is, or is not in their interests. Now someone might acknowledge this distinction, but go on to claim, by way of response, that a judgement which presupposes a point of view or perspective is still 'speaker-relative'. This is perhaps the position which Philippa Foot is advancing, since she refers to the 'speaker-relative' sense as "depending on what the speakers and their group are *interested in* though not now on the good or harm that will come to them themselves". However, the crucial point here is how 'opposing' judgements are construed; and Foot's position is, we might say, seriously relative in that she does not construe such opposing judgements as contradicting one another. Rather, she likens the situation to one in which two racegoers are backing different horses and therefore will take a different view of whether it is a 'good thing' that one horse or another is winning. However, this analysis is by no means forced upon us. What it seems to miss

out, and what the racegoing example hardly does justice to, is that - as Hurka observes¹³ - if we declare the gratuitous infliction of suffering to be bad, or urge the existence of an obligation, we do mean to imply that someone taking the opposite view would be wrong.

At the same time, the position being taken here is not the same as Hurka's. For Hurka takes the position that reference to a 'point of view' is part of the *meaning* of a judgement that something is good. Hence, he interprets the claim that something is good, period, as the claim that it is good 'from all points of view'. This is an example of the kind of claim which Philippa Foot finds puzzling; and understandably so. The position taken here, on the other hand, is that such judgements *presuppose* a point of view: the claim that something is good is the claim, from a point of view, that it is good. On this account, the significance of the 'point of view' is to refer, mainly, to the range of considerations which the speaker regards as appropriate to adduce in support of the claim - the criteria on the basis of which his or her judgement has been reached.

Against this 'objectivist' trend, and pursuing her racecourse example, Foot argues that it would be bizarre to suggest that it really *is* a good thing that one or other horse is winning, and to suggest, on the strength of this, that one of these judgements is right and the other wrong. She takes this as supporting her relativistic interpretation of such claims, as opposed to the view which would interpret them as 'straightforwardly true or false'. However, admitting that it would be bizarre to suppose that it really is a good thing if one particular horse should be winning, there is another explanation for this fact which would not support her interpretation. This is to read the comment as an engagement at the normative level, that is, as an expression of the (really rather reasonable) view that it cannot make a hap'orth of difference to how good a world it is whether one horse or the other should come in first, and therefore as a simple denial of the claims of both racegoers. Alternatively, the racegoers might readily admit that they

¹³ T. Hurka, "'Good' and 'Good for'", *Mind* 96, 1987: 71-73.

were, after all, only speaking for themselves, and how it would affect their lives. All this is to say that one cannot always tell from a form of words how a claim is to be taken but, at any rate, the objective way of taking such words has not been shown to be untenable.

But I should want also to urge a more positive claim. Human beings do have visions of a better world, of how they think society ought to be run, and so forth. And they express these visions and ideals by speaking of how good it would be if this happened, of how someone really ought to see to that; and sometimes too, they use the language of co-option and say such things as 'let us give peace a chance'. To have ideals and aspirations of this kind is part of the range of distinctive human capacities, and part of the means by which human beings make themselves and their societies. But to attempt to explain away the language of obligation, ideal and value, or reduce it to the expression of interest, is effectively to suck human beings dry of aspiration - to deny them this capacity. For it is surely useless to grant that humans have aspirations, while at the same time denying them the language with which to express those aspirations.

Of course, the spectre of Mackie's 'argument from queerness' hovers nearby - the argument that "if there were objective values, then they would be entities, qualities or relations of a very strange sort" ¹⁴. Here, two quick comments will have to suffice. One is that the force of Mackie's argument may depend, to a certain degree, on a somewhat mischievous hypostatization - for example in the query "just what *in the world* is signified by this 'because'?" (as it occurs in the claim that something is wrong because it is cruel)¹⁵. In fact, it is not clear that this question deserves an answer: the claim to truth of a statement describing someone as 'teetering on the brink' ought not to be prejudiced by an inability to identify 'teeterings' *in the world*. The second comment is that in this argument Mackie seems to demand a more substantive account of what there is - objectively - in the world that makes a judgement true than he himself is

¹⁴ *Ethics* (Pelican 1977) p. 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41

10

prepared to support in his earlier paper on 'Simple Truth'¹⁶. In that paper he affirms that a statement may be held true if things are as the statement says they are¹⁷. Applied to judgements about what is good, or about what ought to happen, we should on this basis say that such judgments are true just in case (we are prepared to assert that) the thing *is* good, or *ought* to happen - i.e. if that is how things *are*. If any more substantive notion of correspondence fails to hold even for the claim that the cat is on the mat, we have no right to expect it to hold for normative claims. As before, the crucial thing seems to be the character of our engagement at the first order normative level, and whether, in denying that something is good, or ought to happen, we take ourselves to be denying what the other has asserted.

V

Let us suppose, even if only provisionally, that the distinction between a relative and a non-relative sense of 'good' is upheld. Even so, it could be maintained that the best, and possibly the only, reason for judging something to be good, period, is that it is good for some being or other. Furthermore, it could be urged that it would be perverse and even unfeeling to affirm the goodness of nature in some non-relative sense, in face of the fact that so many natural processes are the source of such misery. This might be labelled the 'panglossian' objection. Dr. Pangloss, it may be recalled, is the character in Voltaire's *Candide* who perseveres to the point of comic absurdity in the view that 'everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds' in the teeth of the most appalling sufferings. Nowhere is the point brought home with more effect than by William James's recording of the story of John Corcoran¹⁸, who was driven by despair to abandon his family and take his own life. James's purpose in telling the story is precisely to shame those whom he calls idealists into abandoning their loftily shallow view of the universe.

¹⁶ J. L. Mackie, "Simple Truth", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20, 1970: 321-333.

¹⁷ "To say that a statement is true is to say that things are as the statement states", p.328.

¹⁸ *Pragmatism* (Harvard University Press 1975) Lecture 1, p.21.

However, as has already been pointed out, the claim being defended here is not the panglossian one that everything is for the best, but only that the actual natural world is good. This more modest claim allows both for the possibility that it might, naturally, have been better, and also for the possibility that human modification might make it better. It further allows that we need not stand on ceremony if a volcano or a hurricane threatens human habitation, since a vital interest will reasonably overcome the claim of what is good. The difficulty which we face would seem rather to be of the opposite kind, that the claim does not amount to very much, or at any rate, that it is not clear what it does amount to.

We have already said that it amounts at least to this: that since natural processes are good, then any human modification needs to be justified if it is to be regarded as a change 'for the better'. We might add that it would also amount to a justification for nature 'conservation', other things being equal, since by conserving nature one would be conserving something good. But something does still need to be said about what would count as nature conservation. Probably the most important point to make here is that the question 'what counts as the natural world?' is a very difficult question to answer; indeed it is not a foregone conclusion that it has a sensible answer. Certainly, we shall need a fairly sophisticated apparatus to produce such an answer. Here, we shall merely attempt to outline a few guiding considerations whose aim will be limited to showing, in the face of sceptical doubts, how it is at least possible that reflective deliberation will come up with a sensible answer or, perhaps, a set of sensible alternative answers.

The first consideration is the need to avoid two extreme interpretations of what is to count as the natural world, answering, more or less, to the two interpretations of 'nature' offered by J. S. Mill in his essay *Nature*. If 'nature' is construed in the first of Mill's two senses, as indicating 'everything, actual and possible', then the claim that nature is good would exclude nothing, and be empty of significance. We clearly need to

identify a sense of 'nature' in which there is something with which it contrasts. If, on the other hand 'nature' is construed in Mill's second sense, as indicating "what takes place ..without the voluntary and intentional agency of man", then although this is nearer to what we want in the sense that there is now something with which 'nature' may be contrasted, the problem is that under some interpretations it probably excludes too much. For example, many human beings are themselves the result of intentional human action, but it would be ridiculous to refuse them the status of natural beings on that account (presumably reserving that status only for those whose conception is accidental!).

To help resolve such problems we need to register at least two distinctions. (In registering these distinctions, we particularly have in mind to answer sceptical claims about the 'impossibility' of separating humans from the natural world.) The first is a distinction between what is merely affected by (intentional) human action, and what is the result of human design: because it is not obvious that merely being affected by human action prevents something from being part of the natural world. One thinks here of all those species that have learned to live in and around human habitation - woodlice, houseleek, jackdaw and the like. In some cases, their species nature is possibly no different from what it would have been if there never had been any humans. And even in cases where this is not so, the way these organisms are now, having adapted to human ways, can still be seen as an expression of their natural potential: for any species, the way it actually is is only ever a partial fulfillment of the ways that it has the capacity to be. However, as the case of human beings themselves suggests, not everything which is the result of human design is thereby excluded from counting as part of the natural world. Among things which are the result of human design, therefore, we need to distinguish, secondly, between what owes its *existence* to intentional human action, and what owes its *nature* to intentional human action. Only the latter circumstance need disqualify an item from counting as a feature of the natural world.

A second consideration is that we should regard the natural world in terms of what it has the potential to be, rather than in terms of its actual realisation. This is because natural systems have considerable regenerative powers, and so long as these powers remain unimpaired, we should probably regard the natural world represented by these systems as still intact, even though particular component populations may have been replaced or temporarily destroyed. (In making this point, we particularly have in mind the sceptical claim that there is little or no natural world left.) There must, however, be limits to this concession: preserving the 'natural world' in gene banks is not enough.

A third consideration is that we should avoid certain counterfactual approaches to identifying what is to count as the natural world. Particularly problematic is the description of the natural world as what would exist but for the human presence. The problem with this description is that it is not obvious that it has any determinate reference. The point is that what would obtain but for the human presence is dependent on countless contingencies. In order to arrive at a determinate description of what would obtain, therefore, it would be necessary to assign determinate values to all potentially relevant variables. But it is difficult to see how such an assignment could be completed, and even if it could, how the assignments could be anything other than arbitrary: for example, at what point, exactly, would one begin this rewriting of natural history? The history would certainly be different for any particular starting point that one chose. However, as our previous 'considerations' are intended to suggest, although such a 'purist' account of nature may be impossible to supply, it may not in fact be necessary or even desirable.

VI

Assuming, then, that there may be some sensible answers to the question of what counts as the natural world, we need finally to explain why and in what circumstances anyone might judge it to be good. The suggestion being offered here is quite a simple

one. It is that the natural world is to be judged good in so far as it is a precondition of human life, and insofar as human life is judged worthwhile¹⁹. Now according to the suggestion, the judgement that the natural world is good is not optional. The basis of the suggestion is that it would be incoherent to judge human life worthwhile, but at the same time to 'reproach' the natural world for being as it is. The natural world has to be 'above reproach' for anyone who genuinely believes that human life is worthwhile, since it is what makes worthwhile human life possible.

An immediate objection might be put to this idea, which is that it is simply fallacious to suppose that we are required to value anything which is a condition of what we judge worthwhile. A dramatic version of the objection would be to point out that we are not required to think that a brutal rape was good, just because we were conceived as a result, and we think our life worthwhile. The reply to this objection is to point out the distinction between a *contingent* condition and a *necessary* one, that is, the distinction between a condition without which something *would* not have happened, and a condition without which it *could* not have happened. In the proffered counter-example, our worthwhile life *could* have come about in some other way; so we are not obliged to value the circumstance which actually brought it about. But the case of the natural world is different. Without its being substantially of the kind that it is, human life *could* not have come about. However, although the judgement that nature is good is not optional *if* we judge human life worthwhile, it holds *only insofar as* we judge human life worthwhile. It turns out, therefore, that the judgement that nature is good is (i) contingent, insofar as one might not judge human life to be worthwhile and (ii) conditional upon the fact that one does so judge it.

It might be helpful at this point to clarify the suggestion in one or two regards and draw out one or two corollaries:

¹⁹ In making this suggestion I believe I may be teasing out one strand of what Holmes Rolston has called 'systemic value'. See, e.g., "Duties to Ecosystems", in J. Baird Callicott (ed.) *Companion to 'A Sand County Almanac'*. (Wisconsin 1987).

Clarifications

We need not suppose that a judgement about the goodness of the natural world is contingent upon whether we think our own individual life is worthwhile. We ought, in other words, to allow for individual misfortune, and for the thought that our own lives might, at any rate, have been worthwhile even if, so far, they have turned out not to be. Nor need we suppose that it is contingent upon our finding human life here and now anything to write home about, provide we also think this due in the main to various human omissions and commissions, which can in principle be remedied. We need only suppose it (naturally) capable of being worthwhile.

It might be thought odd, however, if not downright anthropocentric, to make the goodness of the natural world contingent upon the value of human life specifically. Why should it not be thought good because it makes possible the worthwhile lives of countless other species? But this objection misses the point. The value of human life is not being cited as the 'grounds' for valuing the natural world. As will be explained in a moment (corollaries) the direction of 'grounding' in fact goes the other way. But at the same time, this 'preconditional' account of the value of the natural world should not be confused with a purely instrumental account of its value: it is not being claimed that we judge the natural world good because of the contribution it makes to a worthwhile human life; rather, it is because we value aspects of the natural world that we judge human life to be worthwhile.

Corollaries

There is no doubt that many people value many aspects of the natural world 'for their own sakes'. But that is not a sufficient basis for claiming, or for ascribing to such people the belief that, the natural world is valuable as such, or 'intrinsically'. Thus, according to the perspective being developed here, any attempt to demonstrate the 'intrinsic value' of the natural world is on the wrong track. Nevertheless, the fact that many people value aspects of the natural world 'for their own sakes' is of crucial

importance for the strategy of this alternative perspective, but it enters the strategy in a different way, namely as helping to explain why many people find human life worthwhile. For many people, it is these valued aspects of the natural world which precisely help to build in them their sense that human life is worthwhile. What the present argument adds is that, having come to this sense, they cannot but judge to be good the natural world which has made this possible.

Another perspective on these matters which is sometimes advanced²⁰ is the claim that the presence of (enough) of the natural world is constitutive of the good life for a human being. This is in one sense a bolder claim than the one being advanced here, which is at most that the presence of (enough) of the natural world is constitutive of a good life for a human being. But in another sense it is also weaker. It may be faced by the challenge that a perfectly satisfactory human life can be lived on the basis of nothing other than a purely instrumental valuing of the natural world. Of course the challenge can be fought - with what result I cannot say. But according to the strategy being developed here, on the other hand, even someone who denies that the natural world is a necessary ingredient in any worthwhile human life still has a reason for judging the natural world to be good.

VII

It remains to acknowledge one particular vulnerability in the strategy, which is that it seems not to afford any protection for the future natural world. To say that the natural world has made human life possible, and that human life is worthwhile, is not, apparently, to give any reason for thinking that the continuance of the natural world would be good; unless we say either that the continuance of the natural world (as distinct from one which has been pervasively modified by humans²¹) is necessary for the continuance of human life, or that the continuance of the natural world is necessary

²⁰ For example, by Michael Jacobs, "Sustainable Development, Capital Substitution and Economic Humility: A Response to Beckerman", *Environmental Values* 4, 1995, p. 64.

²¹ Clearly, some sort of natural world is indispensable for human existence.

for a worthwhile human life. And neither of those claims seems, at least to the present writer, sufficiently robust.

In dealing with this problem it may be helpful to remind ourselves of two points, both arising from our proposal to regard the natural world as, logically speaking, an individual. The first is that, if the natural world is any sort of individual at all, then it is a diachronic individual. What this means, among other things, is that it would actually be artificial to treat a reference to the natural world as somehow only having application up to the present. A diachronic individual is an individual with a history, and with a future, and any judgement made with regard to such an individual would naturally be understood to refer to a continuing individual. The second point is that, if the natural world is a diachronic or continuing individual, its continuation must be understood as conforming to the pattern of continuation of an organism²², rather than of an artefact. What distinguishes the development of an organism from the development of an artefact is a certain sort of 'autogenetic' material continuity. That is to say, the material of which an organism is composed is generated from the material of which it was composed (although of course, not entirely). This is often not true in the case of an artefact - a fact which gives rise to notorious problems of identity for artefacts illustrated, for example, by Hobbes's 'ship of Theseus'. In other words, insofar as we judge the natural world to be good, we shall judge its continuation to be good, and moreover we shall require that continuation to be of a certain kind for us to judge that the continuation in question is indeed the continuation of the natural world.

²² There are, of course, many such patterns.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Part II
The Land Ethic and Deep Ecology



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[7]

The Land Ethic

Aldo Leopold

Aldo Leopold (1887–1949) was professor of wildlife management at the University of Wisconsin from 1933 until his death. He is the author of A Sand County Almanac, often called the bible of the contemporary environmental movement.

When god-like Odysseus returned from the wars in Troy, he hanged all on one rope a dozen slave-girls of his household whom he suspected of misbehavior during his absence.

This hanging involved no question of propriety. The girls were property. The disposal of property was then, as now, a matter of expediency, not of right and wrong.

Concepts of right and wrong were not lacking from Odysseus' Greece: witness the fidelity of his wife through the long years before at last his black-prowed galleys clove the wine-dark seas for home. The ethical structure of that day covered wives, but had not yet been extended to human chattels. During the three thousand years which have since elapsed, ethical criteria have been extended to many fields of conduct, with corresponding shrinkages in those judged by expediency only.

THE ETHICAL SEQUENCE

This extension of ethics, so far studied only by philosophers, is actually a process in ecological evolution. Its sequences may be described in ecological as well as in philosophical terms. An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic, philosophically,

This essay originally appeared in *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*.

96 *Environmental Ethics*

is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct. These are two definitions of one thing. The thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation. The ecologist calls these symbioses. Politics and economics are advanced symbioses in which the original free-for-all competition has been replaced, in part, by co-operative mechanisms with an ethical content.

The complexity of co-operative mechanisms has increased with population density, and with the efficiency of tools. It was simpler, for example, to define the anti-social uses of sticks and stones in the days of the mastodons than of bullets and billboards in the age of motors.

The first ethics dealt with the relation between individuals; the Mosaic Decalogue is an example. Later accretions dealt with the relation between the individual and society. The Golden Rule tries to integrate the individual to society; democracy to integrate social organization to the individual.

There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus' slave-girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.

The extension of ethics to this third element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. It is the third step in a sequence. The first two have already been taken. Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief. I regard the present conservation movement as the embryo of such an affirmation.

An ethic may be regarded as a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual. Animal instincts are modes of guidance for the individual in meeting such situations. Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making.

THE COMMUNITY CONCEPT

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skel-

ter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these "resources," but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.

In human history, we have learned (I hope) that the conqueror role is eventually self-defeating. Why? Because it is implicit in such a role that the conqueror knows, *ex cathedra*, just what makes the community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless, in community life. It always turns out that he knows neither, and this is why his conquests eventually defeat themselves.

In the biotic community, a parallel situation exists. Abraham knew exactly what the land was for: it was to drip milk and honey into Abraham's mouth. At the present moment, the assurance with which we regard this assumption is inverse to the degree of our education.

The ordinary citizen today assumes that science knows what makes the community clock tick; the scientist is equally sure that he does not. He knows that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings may never be fully understood.

That man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team is shown by an ecological interpretation of history. Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and land. The characteristics of the land determined the facts quite as potently as the characteristics of the men who lived on it.

Consider, for example, the settlement of the Mississippi valley. In the years following the Revolution, three groups were contending for its control: the native Indian, the French and English traders, and the American settlers. Historians wonder what would have happened if the English at Detroit had thrown a little more weight into the Indian side of those tipsy scales which decided the outcome of the colonial migration into the cane-lands of Kentucky. It is time now to ponder the fact that the cane-lands, when subjected to the particular mixture of forces represented by the cow, plow, fire, and axe of the pioneer, became bluegrass. What if the plant succession inherent in this dark and bloody ground had, under the impact of these forces, given us some worthless sedge, shrub, or weed? Would Boone and Kenton have held out? Would there have been any overflow into Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri? Any Louisiana Purchase? Any transcontinental union of new states? Any Civil War?

98 *Environmental Ethics*

Kentucky was one sentence in the drama of history. We are commonly told what the human actors in this drama tried to do, but we are seldom told that their success, or the lack of it, hung in large degree on the reaction of particular soils to the impact of the particular forces exerted by their occupancy. In the case of Kentucky, we do not even know where the bluegrass came from—whether it is a native species, or a stowaway from Europe.

Contrast the cane-lands with what hindsight tells us about the Southwest, where the pioneers were equally brave, resourceful, and persevering. The impact of occupancy here brought no bluegrass, or other plant fitted to withstand the bumps and buffetings of hard use. This region, when grazed by livestock, reverted through a series of more and more worthless grasses, shrubs, and weeds to a condition of unstable equilibrium. Each recession of plant types bred erosion; each increment to erosion bred a further recession of plants. The result today is a progressive and mutual deterioration, not only of plants and soils, but of the animal community subsisting thereon. The early settlers did not expect this: on the *ciénegas* of New Mexico some even cut ditches to hasten it. So subtle has been its progress that few residents of the region are aware of it. It is quite invisible to the tourist who finds this wrecked landscape colorful and charming (as indeed it is, but it bears scant resemblance to what it was in 1848).

This same landscape was “developed” once before, but with quite different results. The Pueblo Indians settled the Southwest in pre-Columbian times, but they happened *not* to be equipped with range livestock. Their civilization expired, but not because their land expired.

In India, regions devoid of any sod-forming grass have been settled, apparently without wrecking the land, by the simple expedient of carrying the grass to the cow, rather than vice versa. (Was this the result of some deep wisdom, or was it just good luck? I do not know.)

In short, the plant succession steered the course of history; the pioneer simply demonstrated, for good or ill, what successions inhered in the land. Is history taught in this spirit? It will be, once the concept of land as a community really penetrates our intellectual life.

THE ECOLOGICAL CONSCIENCE

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace; progress still consists largely of letterhead pieties and convention oratory. On the back forty we still slip two steps backward for each forward stride.

The usual answer to this dilemma is “more conservation education.” No one will debate this, but is it certain that only the *volume* of education needs stepping up? Is something lacking in the *content* as well?

It is difficult to give a fair summary of its content in brief form, but,

as I understand it, the content is substantially this: obey the law, vote right, join some organizations, and practice what conservation is profitable on your own land; the government will do the rest.

Is not this formula too easy to accomplish anything worth-while? It defines no right or wrong, assigns no obligation, calls for no sacrifice, implies no change in the current philosophy of values. In respect of land-use, it urges only enlightened self-interest. Just how far will such education take us? An example will perhaps yield a partial answer.

By 1930 it had become clear to all except the ecologically blind that southwestern Wisconsin's topsoil was slipping seaward. In 1933 the farmers were told that if they would adopt certain remedial practices for five years, the public would donate CCC labor to install them, plus the necessary machinery and materials. The offer was widely accepted, but the practices were widely forgotten when the five-year contract period was up. The farmers continued only those practices that yielded an immediate and visible economic gain for themselves.

This led to the idea that maybe farmers would learn more quickly if they themselves wrote the rules. Accordingly the Wisconsin Legislature in 1937 passed the Soil Conservation District Law. This said to farmers, in effect: *We, the public, will furnish you free technical service and loan you specialized machinery, if you will write your own rules for land-use. Each county may write its own rules, and these will have the force of law.* Nearly all the counties promptly organized to accept the proffered help, but after a decade of operation, *no county has yet written a single rule.* There has been visible progress in such practices as strip-cropping, pasture renovation, and soil liming, but none in fencing woodlots against grazing, and none in excluding plow and cow from steep slopes. The farmers, in short, have selected those remedial practices which were profitable anyhow, and ignored those which were profitable to the community, but not clearly profitable to themselves.

When one asks why no rules have been written, one is told that the community is not yet ready to support them; education must precede rules. But the education actually in progress makes no mention of obligations to land over and above those dictated by self-interest. The net result is that we have more education but less soil, fewer healthy woods, and as many floods as in 1937.

The puzzling aspect of such situations is that the existence of obligations over and above self-interest is taken for granted in such rural community enterprises as the betterment of roads, schools, churches, and baseball teams. Their existence is not taken for granted, nor as yet seriously discussed, in bettering the behavior of the water that falls on the land, or in the preserving of the beauty or diversity of the farm landscape. Land-use ethics are still governed wholly by economic self-interest, just as social ethics were a century ago.

To sum up: we asked the farmer to do what he conveniently could to save his soil, and he has done just that, and only that. The farmer who clears the woods off a 75 per cent slope, turns his cows into the clearing, and dumps its rainfall, rocks, and soil into the community creek, is still (if otherwise decent) a respected member of society. If he puts lime on his fields and plants his crops on contour, he is still entitled to all the privileges and emoluments of his Soil Conservation District. The District is a beautiful piece of social machinery, but it is coughing along on two cylinders because we have been too timid, and too anxious for quick success, to tell the farmer the true magnitude of his obligations. Obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land.

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial.

SUBSTITUTES FOR A LAND ETHIC

When the logic of history hungers for bread and we hand out a stone, we are at pains to explain how much the stone resembles bread. I now describe some of the stones which serve in lieu of a land ethic.

One basic weakness in a conservation system based wholly on economic motives is that most members of the land community have no economic value. Wildflowers and songbirds are examples. Of the 22,000 higher plants and animals native to Wisconsin, it is doubtful whether more than 5 per cent can be sold, fed, eaten, or otherwise put to economic use. Yet these creatures are members of the biotic community, and if (as I believe) its stability depends on its integrity, they are entitled to continuance.

When one of these non-economic categories is threatened, and if we happen to love it, we invent subterfuges to give it economic importance. At the beginning of the century songbirds were supposed to be disappearing. Ornithologists jumped to the rescue with some distinctly shaky evidence to the effect that insects would eat us up if birds failed to control them. The evidence had to be economic in order to be valid.

It is painful to read these circumlocutions today. We have no land ethic yet, but we have at least drawn nearer the point of admitting that birds should continue as a matter of biotic right, regardless of the presence or absence of economic advantage to us.

A parallel situation exists in respect of predatory mammals, raptorial birds, and fish-eating birds. Time was when biologists somewhat over-

worked the evidence that these creatures preserve the health of game by killing weaklings, or that they control rodents for the farmer, or that they prey only on 'worthless' species. Here again, the evidence had to be economic in order to be valid. It is only in recent years that we hear the more honest argument that predators are members of the community, and that no special interest has the right to exterminate them for the sake of a benefit, real or fancied, to itself. Unfortunately this enlightened view is still in the talk stage. In the field the extermination of predators goes merrily on: witness the impending erasure of the timber wolf by fiat of Congress, the Conservation Bureaus, and many state legislatures.

Some species of trees have been 'read out of the party' by economics-minded foresters because they grow too slowly, or have too low a sale value to pay as timber crops: white cedar, tamarack, cypress, beech, and hemlock are examples. In Europe, where forestry is ecologically more advanced, the non-commercial tree species are recognized as members of the native forest community, to be preserved as such, within reason. Moreover some (like beech) have been found to have a valuable function in building up soil fertility. The interdependence of the forest and its constituent tree species, ground flora, and fauna is taken for granted.

Lack of economic value is sometimes a character not only of species or groups, but of entire biotic communities: marshes, bogs, dunes, and 'deserts' are examples. Our formula in such cases is to relegate their conservation to government as refuges, monuments, or parks. The difficulty is that these communities are usually interspersed with more valuable private lands; the government cannot possibly own or control such scattered parcels. The net effect is that we have relegated some of them to ultimate extinction over large areas. If the private owner were ecologically minded, he would be proud to be the custodian of a reasonable proportion of such areas, which add diversity and beauty to his farm and to his community.

In some instances, the assumed lack of profit in these 'waste' areas has proved to be wrong, but only after most of them had been done away with. The present scramble to reflood muskrat marshes is a case in point.

There is a clear tendency in American conservation to relegate to government all necessary jobs that private landowners fail to perform. Government ownership, operation, subsidy, or regulation is now widely prevalent in forestry, range management, soil and watershed management, park and wilderness conservation, fisheries management, and migratory bird management, with more to come. Most of this growth in governmental conservation is proper and logical, some of it is inevitable. That I imply no disapproval of it is implicit in the fact that I have spent most of my life working for it. Nevertheless the question arises: What is the ultimate magnitude of the enterprise? Will the tax base carry its eventual ramifications? At what point will governmental conservation, like the mastodon,

102 *Environmental Ethics*

become handicapped by its own dimensions? The answer, if there is any, seems to be in a land ethic, or some other force which assigns more obligation to the private landowner.

Industrial landowners and users, especially lumbermen and stockmen, are inclined to wail long and loudly about the extension of government ownership and regulation to land, but (with notable exceptions) they show little disposition to develop the only visible alternative: the voluntary practice of conservation on their own lands.

When the private landowner is asked to perform some unprofitable act for the good of the community, he today assents only with outstretched palm. If the act costs him cash this is fair and proper, but when it costs only forethought, open-mindedness, or time, the issue is at least debatable. The overwhelming growth of land-use subsidises in recent years must be ascribed, in large part, to the government's own agencies for conservation education: the land bureaus, the agricultural colleges, and the extension services. As far as I can detect, no ethical obligation toward land is taught in these institutions.

To sum up: a system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided. It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are (as far as we know) essential to its healthy functioning. It assumes, falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts. It tends to relegate to government many functions eventually too large, too complex, or too widely dispersed to be performed by government.

An ethical obligation on the part of the private owner is the only visible remedy for these situations.

THE LAND PYRAMID

An ethic to supplement and guide the economic relation to land presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a biotic mechanism. We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.

The image commonly employed in conservation education is 'the balance of nature.' For reasons too lengthy to detail here, this figure of speech fails to describe accurately what little we know about the land mechanism. A much truer image is the one employed in ecology: the biotic pyramid. I shall first sketch the pyramid as a symbol of land, and later develop some of its implications in terms of land-use.

Plants absorb energy from the sun. This energy flows through a circuit called the biota, which may be represented by a pyramid consisting of layers. The bottom layer is the soil. A plant layer rests on the soil, an insect

layer on the plants, a bird and rodent layer on the insects, and so on up through various animal groups to the apex layer, which consists of the larger carnivores.

The species of a layer are alike not in where they came from, or in what they look like, but rather in what they eat. Each successive layer depends on those below it for food and often for other services, and each in turn furnishes food and services to those above. Proceeding upward, each successive layer decreases in numerical abundance. Thus, for every carnivore there are hundreds of his prey, thousands of their prey, millions of insects, uncountable plants. The pyramidal form of the system reflects this numerical progression from apex to base. Man shares an intermediate layer with the bears, raccoons, and squirrels which eat both meat and vegetables.

The lines of dependency for food and other services are called food chains. Thus soil-oak-deer-Indian is a chain that has now been largely converted to soil-corn-cow-farmer. Each species, including ourselves, is a link in many chains. The deer eats a hundred plants other than oak, and the cow a hundred plants other than corn. Both, then, are links in a hundred chains. The pyramid is a tangle of chains so complex as to seem disorderly, yet the stability of the system proves it to be a highly organized structure. Its functioning depends on the co-operation and competition of its diverse parts.

In the beginning, the pyramid of life was low and squat; the food chains short and simple. Evolution has added layer after layer, link after link. Man is one of thousands of accretions to the height and complexity of the pyramid. Science has given us many doubts, but it has given us at least one certainty: the trend of evolution is to elaborate and diversify the biota.

Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil. The circuit is not closed; some energy is dissipated in decay, some is added by absorption from the air, some is stored in soils, peats, and long-lived forests; but it is a sustained circuit, like a slowly augmented revolving fund of life. There is always a net loss by downhill wash, but this is normally small and offset by the decay of rocks. It is deposited in the ocean and, in the course of geological time, raised to form new lands and new pyramids.

The velocity and character of the upward flow of energy depend on the complex structure of the plant and animal community, much as the upward flow of sap in a tree depends on its complex cellular organization. Without this complexity, normal circulation would presumably not occur. Structure means the characteristic numbers, as well as the characteristic kinds and functions, of the component species. This interdependence between the complex structure of the land and its smooth functioning as an energy unit is one of its basic attributes.

When a change occurs in one part of the circuit, many other parts must

adjust themselves to it. Change does not necessarily obstruct or divert the flow of energy; evolution is a long series of self-induced changes, the net result of which has been to elaborate the flow mechanism and to lengthen the circuit. Evolutionary changes, however, are usually slow and local. Man's invention of tools has enabled him to make changes of unprecedented violence, rapidity, and scope.

One change is in the composition of floras and faunas. The larger predators are lopped off the apex of the pyramid; food chains, for the first time in history, become shorter rather than longer. Domesticated species from other lands are substituted for wild ones, and wild ones are moved to new habitats. In this world-wide pooling of faunas and floras, some species get out of bounds as pests and diseases, others are extinguished. Such effects are seldom intended or foreseen; they represent unpredicted and often untraceable readjustments in the structure. Agricultural science is largely a race between the emergence of new pests and the emergence of new techniques for their control.

Another change touches the flow of energy through plants and animals and its return to the soil. Fertility is the ability of soil to receive, store, and release energy. Agriculture, by overdrafts on the soil, or by too radical a substitution of domestic for native species in the superstructure, may derange the channels of flow or deplete storage. Soils depleted of their storage, or of the organic matter which anchors it, wash away faster than they form. This is erosion.

Waters, like soil, are part of the energy circuit. Industry, by polluting waters or obstructing them with dams, may exclude the plants and animals necessary to keep energy in circulation.

Transportation brings about another basic change: the plants or animals grown in one region are now consumed and returned to the soil in another. Transportation taps the energy stored in rocks, and in the air, and uses it elsewhere; thus we fertilize the garden with nitrogen gleaned by the guano birds from the fishes of seas on the other side of the Equator. Thus the formerly localized and self-contained circuits are pooled on a world-wide scale.

The process of altering the pyramid for human occupation releases stored energy, and this often gives rise, during the pioneering period, to a deceptive exuberance of plant and animal life, both wild and tame. These releases of biotic capital tend to becloud or postpone the penalties of violence.

This thumbnail sketch of land as an energy circuit conveys three basic ideas:

- (1) That land is not merely soil.
- (2) That the native plants and animals kept the energy circuit open; others may or may not.

(3) That man-made changes are of a different order than evolutionary changes, and have effects more comprehensive than is intended or foreseen.

These ideas, collectively, raise two basic issues: Can the land adjust itself to the new order? Can the desired alterations be accomplished with less violence?

Biotas seem to differ in their capacity to sustain violent conversion. Western Europe, for example, carries a far different pyramid than Caesar found there. Some large animals are lost; swampy forests have become meadows or plow-land; many new plants and animals are introduced, some of which escape as pests; the remaining natives are greatly changed in distribution and abundance. Yet the soil is still there and, with the help of imported nutrients, still fertile; the waters flow normally; the new structure seems to function and to persist. There is no visible stoppage or derangement of the circuit.

Western Europe, then, has a resistant biota. Its inner processes are tough, elastic, resistant to strain. No matter how violent the alterations, the pyramid, so far, has developed some new *modus vivendi* which preserves its habitability for man, and for most of the other natives.

Japan seems to present another instance of radical conversion without disorganization.

Most other civilized regions, and some as yet barely touched by civilization, display various stages of disorganization, varying from initial symptoms to advanced wastage. In Asia Minor and North Africa diagnosis is confused by climatic changes, which may have been either the cause or the effect of advanced wastage. In the United States the degree of disorganization varies locally; it is worst in the Southwest, the Ozarks, and parts of the South, and least in New England and the Northwest. Better land-uses may still arrest it in the less advanced regions. In parts of Mexico, South America, South Africa, and Australia a violent and accelerating wastage is in progress, but I cannot assess the prospects.

This almost world-wide display of disorganization in the land seems to be similar to disease in an animal, except that it never culminates in complete disorganization or death. The land recovers, but at some reduced level of complexity, and with a reduced carrying capacity for people, plants, and animals. Many biotas currently regarded as 'lands of opportunity' are in fact already subsisting on exploitative agriculture, i.e. they have already exceeded their sustained carrying capacity. Most of South America is overpopulated in this sense.

In arid regions we attempt to offset the process of wastage by reclamation, but it is only too evident that the prospective longevity of reclamation projects is often short. In our own West, the best of them may not last a century.

The combined evidence of history and ecology seems to support one general deduction: the less violent the manmade changes, the greater the

probability of successful readjustment in the pyramid. Violence, in turn, varies with human population density; a dense population requires a more violent conversion. In this respect, North America has a better chance for permanence than Europe, if she can contrive to limit her density.

This deduction runs counter to our current philosophy which assumes that because a small increase in density enriched human life, that an indefinite increase will enrich it indefinitely. Ecology knows of no density relationship that holds for indefinitely wide limits. All gains from density are subject to a law of diminishing returns.

Whatever may be the equation for men and land, it is improbable that we as yet know all its terms. Recent discoveries in mineral and vitamin nutrition reveal unsuspected dependencies in the up-circuit: incredibly minute quantities of certain substances determine the value of soils to plants, of plants to animals. What of the down-circuit? What of the vanishing species, the preservation of which we now regard as an esthetic luxury? They helped build the soil; in what unsuspected ways may they be essential to its maintenance? Professor Weaver proposes that we use prairie flowers to reflocculate the wasting soils of the dust bowl; who knows for what purpose cranes and condors, otters and grizzlies may some day be used?

LAND HEALTH AND THE A-B CLEAVAGE

A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.

Conservationists are notorious for their dissensions. Superficially these seem to add up to mere confusion, but a more careful scrutiny reveals a single plane of cleavage common to many specialized fields. In each field one group (A) regards the land as soil, and its function as commodity-production; another group (B) regards the land as a biota, and its function as something broader. How much broader is admittedly in a state of doubt and confusion.

In my own field, forestry, group A is quite content to grow trees like cabbages, with cellulose as the basic forest commodity. It feels no inhibition against violence; its ideology is agronomic. Group B, on the other hand, sees forestry as fundamentally different from agronomy because it employs natural species, and manages a natural environment rather than creating an artificial one. Group B prefers natural reproduction on principle. It worries on biotic as well as economic grounds about the loss of species like chestnut, and the threatened loss of the white pines. It worries about a whole series of secondary forest functions: wildlife, recreation, watersheds,

wilderness areas. To my mind, Group B feels the stirrings of an ecological conscience.

In the wildlife field, a parallel cleavage exists. For Group A the basic commodities are sport and meat; the yardsticks of production are ciphers of take in pheasants and trout. Artificial propagation is acceptable as a permanent as well as a temporary recourse—if its unit costs permit. Group B, on the other hand, worries about a whole series of biotic side-issues. What is the cost in predators of producing a game crop? Should we have further recourse to exotics? How can management restore the shrinking species, like prairie grouse, already hopeless as shootable game? How can management restore the threatened rarities, like trumpeter swan and whooping crane? Can management principles be extended to wildflowers? Here again it is clear to me that we have the same A-B cleavage as in forestry.

In the larger field of agriculture I am less competent to speak, but there seem to be somewhat parallel cleavages. Scientific agriculture was actively developing before ecology was born, hence a slower penetration of ecological concepts might be expected. Moreover the farmer, by the very nature of his techniques, must modify the biota more radically than the forester or the wildlife manager. Nevertheless, there are many discontents in agriculture which seem to add up to a new vision of 'biotic farming.'

Perhaps the most important of these is the new evidence that poundage or tonnage is no measure of the food-value of farm crops; the products of fertile soil may be qualitatively as well as quantitatively superior. We can bolster poundage from depleted soils by pouring on imported fertility, but we are not necessarily bolstering food-value. The possible ultimate ramifications of this idea are so immense that I must leave their exposition to abler pens.

The discontent that labels itself 'organic farming,' while bearing some of the earmarks of a cult, is nevertheless biotic in its direction, particularly in its insistence on the importance of soil flora and fauna.

The ecological fundamentals of agriculture are just as poorly known to the public as in other fields of land-use. For example, few educated people realize that the marvelous advances in technique made during recent decades are improvements in the pump, rather than the well. Acre for acre, they have barely sufficed to offset the sinking level of fertility.

In all of these cleavages, we see repeated the same basic paradoxes: man the conqueror *versus* man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of his sword *versus* science the search-light on his universe; land the slave and servant *versus* land the collective organism. Robinson's injunction to Tristram may well be applied, at this juncture, to *Homo sapiens* as a species in geological time:

Whether you will or not
You are a King, Tristram, for you are one

108 *Environmental Ethics*

Of the time-tested few that leave the world,
When they are gone, not the same place it was.
Mark what you leave.

THE OUTLOOK

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.

Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land. Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He had no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow. Turn him loose for a day on the land, and if the spot does not happen to be a golf links or a 'scenic' area, he is bored stiff. If crops could be raised by hydroponics instead of farming, it would suit him very well. Synthetic substitutes for wood, leather, wool, and other natural land products suit him better than the originals. In short, land is something he has 'outgrown.'

Almost equally serious as an obstacle to a land ethic is the attitude of the farmer for whom the land is still an adversary, or a taskmaster that keeps him in slavery. Theoretically, the mechanization of farming ought to cut the farmer's chains, but whether it really does is debatable.

One of the requisites for an ecological comprehension of land is an understanding of ecology, and this is by no means co-extensive with 'education'; in fact, much higher education seems deliberately to avoid ecological concepts. An understanding of ecology does not necessarily originate in courses bearing ecological labels; it is quite as likely to be labeled geography, botany, agronomy, history, or economics. This is as it should be, but whatever the label, ecological training is scarce.

The case for a land ethic would appear hopeless but for the minority which is in obvious revolt against these 'modern' trends.

The 'key-log' which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

It of course goes without saying that economic feasibility limits the tether of what can or cannot be done for land. It always has and it always will. The fallacy the economic determinists have tied around our collective

neck, and which we now need to cast off, is the belief that economics determines *all* land-use. This is simply not true. An innumerable host of actions and attitudes, comprising perhaps the bulk of all land relations, is determined by the land-users' tastes and predilections, rather than by his purse. The bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill, and faith rather than on investments of cash. As a land-user thinketh, so is he.

I have purposely presented the land ethic as a product of social evolution because nothing so important as an ethic is ever 'written.' Only the most superficial student of history supposes that Moses 'wrote' the Decalogue; it evolved in the minds of a thinking community, and Moses wrote a tentative summary of it for a 'seminar.' I say tentative because evolution never stops.

The evolution of a land ethic is an intellectual as well as emotional process. Conservation is paved with good intentions which prove to be futile, or even dangerous, because they are devoid of critical understanding either of the land, or of economic land-use. I think it is a truism that as the ethical frontier advances from the individual to the community, its intellectual content increases.

The mechanism of operation is the same for any ethic: social approbation for right actions: social disapproval for wrong actions.

By and large, our present problem is one of attitudes and implements. We are remodeling the Alhambra with a steamshovel, and we are proud of our yardage. We shall hardly relinquish the shovel, which after all has many good points, but we are in need of gentler and more objective criteria for its successful use.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[8]

The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary*

Arne Naess
University of Oslo

Ecologically responsible policies are concerned only in part with pollution and resource depletion. There are deeper concerns which touch upon principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness.

The emergence of ecologists from their former relative obscurity marks a turning-point in our scientific communities. But their message is twisted and misused. A shallow, but presently rather powerful movement, and a deep, but less influential movement, compete for our attention. I shall make an effort to characterize the two.

1. *The Shallow Ecology movement* :

Fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries.

2. *The Deep Ecology movement* :

(1) Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational, total-field image*. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things *A* and *B* is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of *A* and *B*, so that without the relation, *A* and *B* are no longer the same things. The total-field model dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept — except when talking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication.

(2) *Biospherical egalitarianism* — in principle. The 'in principle' clause is inserted because any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression. The ecological field-worker acquires a deep-seated respect, or even veneration, for ways and forms of life. He reaches an understanding from within, a kind of understanding that

* Summary of an Introductory Lecture at the 3rd World Future Research Conference, Bucharest, 3–10 September 1972. The lecture itself will be published as part of the Proceedings of the meeting.

96 *Arne Naess*

others reserve for fellow men and for a narrow section of ways and forms of life. To the ecological field-worker, *the equal right to live and blossom* is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Its restriction to humans is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of humans themselves. This quality depends in part upon the deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership with other forms of life. The attempt to ignore our dependence and to establish a master-slave role has contributed to the alienation of man from himself.

Ecological egalitarianism implies the reinterpretation of the future-research variable, 'level of crowding', so that *general* mammalian crowding and loss of life-equality is taken seriously, not only human crowding. (Research on the high requirements of free space of certain mammals has, incidentally, suggested that theorists of human urbanism have largely underestimated human life-space requirements. Behavioural crowding symptoms [neuroses, aggressiveness, loss of traditions . . .] are largely the same among mammals.)

(3) *Principles of diversity and of symbiosis.* Diversity enhances the potentialities of survival, the chances of new modes of life, the richness of forms. And the so-called struggle of life, and survival of the fittest, should be interpreted in the sense of ability to coexist and cooperate in complex relationships, rather than ability to kill, exploit, and suppress. 'Live and let live' is a more powerful ecological principle than 'Either you or me'.

The latter tends to reduce the multiplicity of kinds of forms of life, and also to create destruction within the communities of the same species. Ecologically inspired attitudes therefore favour diversity of human ways of life, of cultures, of occupations, of economies. They support the fight against economic and cultural, as much as military, invasion and domination, and they are opposed to the annihilation of seals and whales as much as to that of human tribes or cultures.

(4) *Anti-class posture.* Diversity of human ways of life is in part due to (intended or unintended) exploitation and suppression on the part of certain groups. The exploiter lives differently from the exploited, but both are adversely affected in their potentialities of self-realization. The principle of diversity does not cover differences due merely to certain attitudes or behaviours forcibly blocked or restrained. The principles of ecological egalitarianism and of symbiosis support the

Deep Ecology Movement 97

same anti-class posture. The ecological attitude favours the extension of all three principles to any group conflicts, including those of today between developing and developed nations. The three principles also favour extreme caution towards any over-all plans for the future, except those consistent with wide and widening classless diversity.

(5) Fight against *pollution and resource depletion*. In this fight ecologists have found powerful supporters, but sometimes to the detriment of their total stand. This happens when attention is focused on pollution and resource depletion rather than on the other points, or when projects are implemented which reduce pollution but increase evils of the other kinds. Thus, if prices of life necessities increase because of the installation of anti-pollution devices, class differences increase too. An ethics of responsibility implies that ecologists do not serve the shallow, but the deep ecological movement. That is, not only point (5), but all seven points must be considered together.

Ecologists are irreplaceable informants in any society, whatever their political colour. If well organized, they have the power to reject jobs in which they submit themselves to institutions or to planners with limited ecological perspectives. As it is now, ecologists sometimes serve masters who deliberately ignore the wider perspectives.

(6) *Complexity, not complication*. The theory of ecosystems contains an important distinction between what is complicated without any Gestalt or unifying principles — we may think of finding our way through a chaotic city — and what is complex. A multiplicity of more or less lawful, interacting factors may operate together to form a unity, a system. We make a shoe or use a map or integrate a variety of activities into a workaday pattern. Organisms, ways of life, and interactions in the biosphere in general, exhibit complexity of such an astoundingly high level as to colour the general outlook of ecologists. Such complexity makes thinking in terms of vast systems inevitable. It also makes for a keen, steady perception of the profound *human ignorance* of biospherical relationships and therefore of the effect of disturbances.

Applied to humans, the complexity-not-complication principle favours division of labour, *not fragmentation of labour*. It favours integrated actions in which the whole person is active, not mere reactions. It favours complex economies, an integrated variety of means of living. (Combinations of industrial and agricultural activity, of intellectual and manual work, of specialized and non-specialized occupations, of

98 *Arne Naess*

urban and non-urban activity, of work in city and recreation in nature with recreation in city and work in nature . . .)

It favours soft technique and 'soft future-research', less prognosis, more clarification of possibilities. More sensitivity towards continuity and live traditions, and — most importantly — towards our state of ignorance.

The implementation of ecologically responsible policies requires in this century an exponential growth of technical skill and invention — but in new directions, directions which today are not consistently and liberally supported by the research policy organs of our nation-states.

(7) *Local autonomy and decentralization.* The vulnerability of a form of life is roughly proportional to the weight of influences from afar, from outside the local region in which that form has obtained an ecological equilibrium. This lends support to our efforts to strengthen local self-government and material and mental self-sufficiency. But these efforts presuppose an impetus towards decentralization. Pollution problems, including those of thermal pollution and recirculation of materials, also lead us in this direction, because increased local autonomy, if we are able to keep other factors constant, reduces energy consumption. (Compare an approximately self-sufficient locality with one requiring the importation of foodstuff, materials for house construction, fuel and skilled labour from other continents. The former may use only five per cent of the energy used by the latter.) Local autonomy is strengthened by a reduction in the number of links in the hierarchical chains of decision. (For example a chain consisting of local board, municipal council, highest sub-national decision-maker, a state-wide institution in a state federation, a federal national government institution, a coalition of nations, and of institutions, e.g. E.E.C. top levels, and a global institution, can be reduced to one made up of local board, nation-wide institution, and global institution.) Even if a decision follows majority rules at each step, many local interests may be dropped along the line, if it is too long.

Summing up, then, it should, first of all, be borne in mind that the norms and tendencies of the Deep Ecology movement are not derived from ecology by logic or induction. Ecological knowledge and the life-style of the ecological field-worker have *suggested, inspired, and fortified* the perspectives of the Deep Ecology movement. Many of the formulations in the above seven-point survey are rather vague generalizations, only tenable if made more precise in certain directions.

Deep Ecology Movement 99

But all over the world the inspiration from ecology has shown remarkable convergencies. The survey does not pretend to be more than one of the possible condensed codifications of these convergencies.

Secondly, it should be fully appreciated that the significant tenets of the Deep Ecology movement are clearly and forcefully *normative*. They express a value priority system only in part based on results (or lack of results, cf. point [6]) of scientific research. Today, ecologists try to influence policy-making bodies largely through threats, through predictions concerning pollutants and resource depletion, knowing that policy-makers accept at least certain minimum *norms* concerning health and just distribution. But it is clear that there is a vast number of people in all countries, and even a considerable number of people in power, who accept as valid the wider norms and values characteristic of the Deep Ecology movement. There are political potentials in this movement which should not be overlooked and which have little to do with pollution and resource depletion. In plotting possible futures, the norms should be freely used and elaborated.

Thirdly, in so far as ecology movements deserve our attention, they are *ecophilosophical* rather than ecological. Ecology is a *limited* science which makes *use* of scientific methods. Philosophy is the most general forum of debate on fundamentals, descriptive as well as prescriptive, and political philosophy is one of its subsections. By an *ecosophy* I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of *sofia* wisdom, is openly normative, it contains *both* norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements *and* hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction.

The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc., but also value priorities. Today, however, the seven points listed provide one unified framework for ecosophical systems.

In general system theory, systems are mostly conceived in terms of causally or functionally interacting or interrelated items. An ecosophy, however, is more like a system of the kind constructed by Aristotle or Spinoza. It is expressed verbally as a set of sentences with a variety of functions, descriptive and prescriptive. The basic relation is that between subsets of premisses and subsets of conclusions, that is, the relation of derivability. The relevant notions of derivability may be classed according to rigour, with logical and mathematical deductions

100 Arne Naess

topping the list, but also according to how much is implicitly taken for granted. An exposition of an ecosophy must necessarily be only moderately precise considering the vast scope of relevant ecological and normative (social, political, ethical) material. At the moment, ecosophy might profitably use models of systems, rough approximations of global systematizations. It is the global character, not preciseness in detail, which distinguishes an ecosophy. It articulates and integrates the efforts of an ideal ecological team, a team comprising not only scientists from an extreme variety of disciplines, but also students of politics and active policy-makers.

Under the name of *ecologism*, various deviations from the deep movement have been championed — primarily with a one-sided stress on pollution and resource depletion, but also with a neglect of the great differences between under- and over-developed countries in favour of a vague global approach. The global approach is essential, but regional differences must largely determine policies in the coming years.

SELECTED LITERATURE

- Commoner, B., *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1971.
- Ehrlich, P. R. and A. H., *Population, Resources, Environment: Issues in Human Ecology*, 2nd ed., W. H. Freeman & Co., San Francisco 1972.
- Ellul, J., *The Technological Society*, English ed., Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1964.
- Glacken, C. J., *Traces on the Rhodian Shore. Nature and Culture in Western Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1967.
- Kato, H., 'The Effects of Crowding', Quality of Life Conference, Oberhausen, April 1972.
- McHarg, Ian L., *Design with Nature*, 1969. Paperback 1971, Doubleday & Co., New York.
- Meynaud, J., *Technocracy*, English ed., Free Press of Glencoe, Chicago 1969.
- Mishan, E. J., *Technology and Growth: The Price We Pay*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York 1970.
- Odum, E. P., *Fundamentals of Ecology*, 3rd ed., W. E. Saunders Co., Philadelphia 1971.
- Shepard, Paul, *Man in the Landscape*, A. A. Knopf, New York.

[9]

Hume's *Is/Ought* Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic

J. Baird Callicott*

Environmental ethics in its modern classical expression by Aldo Leopold appears to fall afoul of Hume's prohibition against deriving *ought*-statements from *is*-statements since it is presented as a logical consequence of the science of ecology. Hume's *is/ought* dichotomy is reviewed in its historical theoretical context. A general formulation bridging *is* and *ought*, in Hume's terms, meeting his own criteria for sound practical argument, is found. It is then shown that Aldo Leopold's land ethic is expressible as a special case of this general formulation. Hence Leopold's land ethic, despite its direct passage from descriptive scientific premises to prescriptive normative conclusions, is not in violation of any logical strictures which Hume would impose upon axiological reasoning.

The third part of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, a work which has become the modern classic of environmental philosophy, is called "The Upshot." It seems to have been intended as a presentation in a conceptually more abstract and logically more systematic way of some implications of the ecological ideas which are concretely and poetically conveyed in parts one and two. The essay, "The Land Ethic," is the culmination of that third section, the upshot of the upshot, so to speak. The land ethic thus appears to have been supposed by its author to *follow from* the largely descriptive essays which illustrate ecological principles and which precede it. Indeed, just months before his death in 1948 Leopold wrote the foreword to this collection of essays in which he reveals his own sense of the relationship of the descriptive narratives to the prescriptive epilogue: "That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. That land yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known but latterly often forgotten. These essays attempt to weld these three concepts."¹

* Department of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, WI 54481. Callicott's major professional interests are ancient Greek philosophy and environmental philosophy. He has written extensively on philosophical issues associated with the Aldo Leopold land ethic. The author wishes to thank Don Marietta, Florida Atlantic University, and Tom Overholt and Jeffrey Olen, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, for helpful criticisms and suggestions for improving both the substance and style of this paper.

¹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. viii, ix.

Upon reading these words academic philosophers may be inclined to read no further, for Leopold, the father of contemporary environmental ethics, here has blithely stepped across the barrier separating *is* from *ought*, i.e., he has committed the naturalistic fallacy (as sometimes the transition from *is* to *ought* is mistakenly called); he has ventured to derive *value* from *fact* (or at least from a certain theoretical organization of facts). Environmental ethics, therefore, as a distinct ethical theory which provides direct moral standing for land (in Leopold's inclusive sense) *if stimulated and informed by the body of empirical information and theory of ecology*, seems, in its original and most powerful expression, doomed to break up on the shoals of the *is/ought* dichotomy.

During the last decade, environmental ethics, which quite clearly has been inspired by ecology and the other environmental sciences, has come to the attention of the academic philosophical community. Not surprisingly, the *is/ought* dichotomy has haunted academic environmental ethics and threatens to be its Achilles heel. In a seminal discussion, Holmes Rolston, III provided a clear statement of the *fact/value* problem as it applies to environmental ethics and explored a conceptual framework for its solution, which he called *metaecology* (in which "description and evaluation to some extent arise together") and he has developed this approach more fully in two subsequent articles.² Don E. Marietta, Jr., meanwhile, has addressed the same problem employing the conceptual tools of phenomenology in two papers, the first of which drew criticism and a reaffirmation of the recalcitrance of the *is/ought* dichotomy for environmental ethics from Tom Regan.³ In this paper, I pursue a less creative and forward-looking approach than my colleagues, Rolston and Marietta; I wage, as it were, a rearguard historical action on their behalf, in case their arguments fall on deaf ears and the *received* opinion is dogmatically and uncritically reasserted by their opponents. Accordingly, I first locate both the *is/ought* dichotomy and the naturalistic fallacy in their respective historical contexts. The naturalistic fallacy is dismissed as an issue too parochial to be practically relevant to contemporary environmental ethics. I argue that the much more general problem of the transition from *is* to *ought* in practical moral reasoning actually has an easy solution within the ethical system of Hume, the first to pose the problem. Finally, I show that the conceptual foundations of the Leopold land ethic, the modern paradigm of environmental ethics provide, *on Humean grounds*, for a direct passage from the perceived

² Holmes Rolston, III, "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" *Ethics* 85 (1975): 93-109; "Values in Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 113-28; "Are Values in Nature Subjective or Objective?" (this issue).

³ Don E. Marietta, Jr., "The Interrelationship of Ecological Science and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1979): 195-207; "Knowledge and Obligation in Environmental Ethics: A Phenomenological Approach" (this issue). Tom Regan, "On the Connection Between Environmental Science and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 363-66.

facts that we are natural beings and that we belong to a biotic community to the principal *values* of the land ethic.

A resolution of the *fact/value* problem on Humean grounds is especially appropriate and important to the Leopold land ethic, because the Leopold land ethic rests, ultimately, upon a Humean theoretical foundation. As I pointed out in an earlier discussion, Leopold's conception of an ethic ("a limitation on freedom of action in the *struggle for existence*" and "a differentiation of *social from anti-social conduct*") and his understanding of the origin of ethics ("in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to *evolve* modes of cooperation") lies, quite clearly, squarely within the tradition of biological thought about ethics which began with Darwin and has been recently formalized by Edward O. Wilson.⁴ What may not be obvious from reading Leopold is that Darwin's conception of ethics, in turn, owes a debt to Hume, who argues that ethical behavior depends upon and is motivated by "the moral sentiments."

As Anthony Flew has pointed out, Hume's ethics "might almost seem to demand an evolutionary background."⁵ How else could Hume explain, what he claims to be a fact, that the moral sentiments are both natural and universal, that is, that they are fixed psychological characteristics of human nature?⁶ Darwin's theory provides a very plausible explanation, *viz.*, that the moral sentiments are fixed in human nature, like all other standard traits, by natural selection. On the other hand, no other available analysis of morals than Hume's would have been useful to Darwin. Natural history could not in principle brook a "divine will" or other supernatural account of ethics, and the standard philosophical account, so forcefully represented by Kant, that morality depends exclusively upon reason, from an evolutionary point of view, puts the cart before the horse. Reason appears to be the most advanced and delicate human faculty, one which cannot possibly be imagined as having evolved apart from an intensely social context, while society itself cannot be imagined as existing in the absence of moral restraints, *i.e.*, limitations on freedom of action in the struggle for existence.

The moral sentiments (as fellow feeling, sympathy, benevolence, affection, generosity), Darwin argues, co-evolved with the evolution of protohuman societies. On the subject of "the all-important emotion of sympathy," (which, revealingly, is also all-important to Hume), Darwin writes:

In however complex a manner this *feeling* may have originated, as it is one of high importance to all those animals which aid and defend one another, it will

⁴ J. Baird Callicott, "Elements of an Environmental Ethic: Moral Considerability and the Biotic Community," *Environmental Ethics* 1 (1979): 71-81.

⁵ Anthony Flew, *Evolutionary Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 59.

⁶ Cf. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), bk. 3, pt. 3, sec. 1, pp. 469-70.

have been increased through natural selection; for those *communities*, which included the greatest number of sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring.⁷

There, in brief, is Darwin's explanation of the origin of ethics. They arise in association with the survival advantages of society or community and depend ultimately, as Hume so powerfully argued, not on reason alone, but upon passion, feeling, or sentiment. It is clear, moreover, from his language that Leopold follows Darwin's basic account of the origin and evolution of ethics and thus, through Darwin, is committed to an essentially Humean theory of the foundations of morals.

II

The term, *naturalistic fallacy*, was introduced in 1903 by G. E. Moore in *Principia Ethica*.⁸ It is not, properly speaking, another name for the *is/ought* logical lacuna, the putative fallacy, discovered by Hume, of stating a conclusion containing the copula *ought* derived from premises all connected by the copula *is*, although some writers have apparently supposed that it is.⁹ Rather, what vexed Moore was the identification of goodness with some other quality. When Bentham, for example, says that only pleasure is good and only pain evil, he commits the naturalistic fallacy, as defined by Moore. Moore claimed that *good* is not some other "natural thing," like pleasure or intelligence; it is an irreducible "nonnatural quality" inhering in objects and we somehow intuit its presence. The naturalistic fallacy as Moore defined it, thus, is not, logically speaking, a fallacy proper, since no argument or passage from premises to conclusion is involved. In its strict Moorean sense it is so specifically tied to Moore's ethics, to serve as a rubric to characterize all those theories at odds with his doctrine of nonnatural moral qualities, as to be of little moment, one way or the other. To accuse Leopold (or other environmental ethicists) of committing the naturalistic fallacy, in other words, amounts to little more than

⁷ Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 2nd ed. (New York: J. A. Hill and Co., 1904), p. 107 (emphasis added). Cf. Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 577–78.

⁸ George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903), chap. 1, sec. B, no. 9 ff.

⁹ For example, (representing environmental ethics) John Rodman, "The Liberation of Nature?" *Inquiry* 10 (1977): 83–131 writes, "First, there is the powerful prohibition of modern culture against confusing 'is' and 'ought,' the 'natural' with the 'moral'—in short the taboo against committing 'the naturalistic fallacy.'" Anthony Flew writing in a more traditional context, provides another example in "On Not Deriving 'Ought' from 'Is'" in *The Is/Ought Question*, ed. W. D. Hudson (London: Macmillan, 1969) in which "naturalistic fallacy" and "*is/ought* dichotomy" are used interchangeably. William Frankena in a very thorough analysis of Moore ("The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind* 48 (1949): 464–77) very convincingly argues that the *is/ought* dichotomy and the naturalistic fallacy are two distinct issues and that the naturalistic fallacy is not a *fallacy* in the proper sense of the word.

the accusation that they do not conform to Moore's beliefs about the nature of goodness—hardly a cause for alarm.

Hume's *is/ought* dichotomy, however, is much more general in scope and application, and is therefore a much more formidable problem for environmental ethics, as it is for any ethic whose conceptual foundations rest in part upon empirical and theoretical claims about the world as well as upon strictly valuative and deontic statements.

III

Hume's famous observation respecting the unexplained and unjustified transition from *is* and *is not* to *ought* and *ought not* in most "vulgar systems of morality" occurs at the end of book 3, part 1, section 1 of the *Treatise* as the *coup de grace* in a series of arguments all designed to prove that distinctions of good and evil, vice and virtue, are not "founded merely on the relations of objects nor . . . perceiv'd by reason." Such judgments, as, for example, that this action is good or that that is vicious, are founded, rather, upon *sentiment*, not reason, according to Hume. Good and evil are not, as we should say today, objective qualities; they are, in Hume's terms, neither "matters of fact" nor "real relations" among objects. We find them rather in our "own breast"; they are *feelings* of approbation or disapprobation, warm approval or repugnance, which spontaneously arise in us upon the contemplation of some action or object. If we should witness some act of willful murder, for example, the evil or vice is not a quality of the act as red is a quality of spilled blood; rather, "from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it."¹⁰ The alleged evil of the action is, as it were, a projection of the quality of that subjective feeling which originates within us when we witness or imagine murder. And so similarly with other moral judgments, e.g., that charity is good, that injustice is bad, and so on: feeling, not reason (in the sense of *dispassionate* observation), is their ultimate foundation.

From this brief account of the core concepts of Hume's moral theory, one might jump to the conclusion that Hume's ethics is both abjectly relativistic and abjectly skeptical. It is neither. The moral sentiments are both *natural* and *universally distributed* among human beings as I mentioned before. In other words, like physical features—the placement of the eyes in the head, two arms, two legs, an opposed thumb, etc.—the moral sentiments are only slightly variable psychological features common to all people. Just as there are people, to be sure, who are physically freakish or maimed, so there may be people who, because of congenital defect or the vagaries of life, are lacking one, several, or all of the moral sentiments to one degree or another. Still, we can speak of

¹⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 469.

normal and even correct moral judgments, the exceptions notwithstanding, just as we can speak of physical normality and even correct bodily proportions and conditions. Hume's ethical subjectivism, therefore, does not necessarily imply that right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice are, so to speak, existentially indeterminate, nor does his theory collapse into an emotive relativism.

Furthermore, according to Hume, cognition plays a significant and substantial role in moral action and judgment; in Hume's words, "reason in a strict and philosophical sense can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion."¹¹ Both of these influences of reason on our conduct are especially relevant to the immediate problem with which this discussion began, the metaethical defensibility of the informative relationship of ecology and environmental science to environmental ethics.

First, let us take a simple example to illustrate the latter use of reason in a practical argument meeting Hume's precise and exacting criteria. (Our example involves only "self-love," not any of the "moral sentiments.") Suppose a parent says to her teenage daughter, "You *ought not* smoke cigarettes"; the teenager asks, "Why not?"; and the parent replies, "Because cigarette smoking *is* deleterious to health." If the daughter has taken a freshman course in philosophy, she might well triumphantly reply, "Hah, you have deduced an *ought* from an *is*; you have committed the naturalistic fallacy [a sophomoric misnomer]. Unless you can provide a metaethically more cogent argument, I shall continue to smoke cigarettes."

Reason (i.e., medical science) has rather recently discovered that cigarette smoking is indeed deleterious to health. It has discovered a previously unknown "connexion of causes and effects." This discovery "afford[s] us means of exerting . . . passion," namely the passion we normally all feel for our own good health and well-being. But precisely because this passion is so nearly universal in human nature, mention of it is ordinarily omitted from practical argument. And because it is not mentioned, we may experience what one writer recently has called, "the mystery of the passage from 'is' to 'ought.'"¹²

The mystery dissolves, on Hume's own grounds, when the missing premise referring to passion, feeling, or sentiment is explicitly included in the argument. Let our parent formulate her argument as follows: "(1) Cigarette smoking is deleterious to health. (2) Your health is something toward which as a matter of fact you have a positive attitude (as today we would say; a warm

¹¹ Ibid., p. 469.

¹² Regan, "On the Connection between Environmental Science and Environmental Ethics," p. 363.

sentiment or passion, as Hume, more colorfully, would put it). (3) Therefore, you ought not smoke cigarettes." If Hume has not simply contradicted himself in granting to reason the role in practical deliberation of discovering "the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion," then this is a perfectly legitimate transition from *is*-statements to an *ought*-statement. It may not be a deduction, in the strictest logical sense, but it is a cogent practical argument, according to Hume's own criteria (which are in his judgment so "strict and philosophical").¹³

It may be worth noting in passing that Kant, an attentive reader of Hume, did, as a matter of fact, regard practical arguments like the one above as *deductive*. In Kantian terminology the conclusion, "you ought not to smoke" is a *hypothetical imperative*, more specifically, an imperative of prudence. And Kant tells us that "whoever wills the end [in our example, health], so far as reason has decisive influence on his action, wills also the indispensably necessary means to it [in our example, refraining from smoking cigarettes] that lie in his power. This proposition, in what concerns the will is *analytical*."¹⁴

Our smoking teenager may still have a rejoinder; she may deny (or at least discount) either premise (1) or (2). Following the example of the tobacco industry, a philosophical teenager might deny premise (1) and insist upon (an incidentally un-Humean) strict interpretation of cause and effect as necessary connection, not as mere correlation of events. Premise (2) might be "denied" in several ways. A reckless indifference to health might be insisted upon or, admitting a positive attitude toward health, other, *conflicting passions* may be confessed to be more intense and thus to motivate action, for example, a need for acceptance among a certain peer group, or an overwhelming desire for the immediate sensations that cigarette smoking produces. If either premise (1) or premise (2) is denied, our hapless parent has no further recourse to practical *argument*. If premise (1) is denied, the expert witness of a physiologist or

³ Commenting on Hume's ethical theory, Philippa Foot writes, "Between these calm and indolent judgments [of reason] and the assertion that something should be done there is, Hume thinks, the famous gap between *is* and *ought*. Hume thought he himself had hit on the perfect solution to the problem. The new element in a proposition about virtue was the reference to a special sentiment of approbation: nothing new in the object, but something in ourselves," "Hume on Moral Judgment," *David Hume: A Symposium*, ed. D. F. Pears (London: Macmillan and Co., 1963), pp. 73-74. Foot, thus, has anticipated me in believing that Hume himself regarded the *is/ought* logical lacuna to be bridged by a premise referring to passion, sentiment, or interest. A more elaborate and detailed argument along similar lines may be found in A. C. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'" in *The Is/Ought Question*. As MacIntyre sums up his argument, "One has to go beyond the [*is/ought*] passage . . . ; but if one does so, it is plain that we can connect the facts of the situation with what we ought to do only by means of one of those concepts which Hume treats under the heading of the passions . . ." (p. 48).

¹⁴ Emmanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 34 (emphasis added). Philippa Foot develops this line of thought in "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972): 303-16.

philosopher of science might help, or if premise (2) is, psychological counseling could be prescribed.

IV

Returning to the relationship of ecology and the environmental sciences to environmental ethics, it should now be obvious what sort of defense might be put up on behalf of Leopold and his more recent exponents, who are accused of attempting illicitly to reason out *ought*-statements from *is*-statements. Let us construct an environmental ethical argument having the same form as our simple paradigm, but involving a premise drawn from ecology and the environmental sciences, just as that of the paradigm involved a premise drawn from the medical sciences.

(1) The biological sciences including ecology have disclosed (a) that organic nature is systemically integrated, (b) that mankind is a nonprivileged member of the organic continuum, and (c) that therefore environmental abuse threatens human life, health, and happiness. (2) We human beings share a common *interest* in human life, health, and happiness. (3) Therefore, we ought not violate the integrity and stability of the natural environment by loading it with hazardous wastes or by extirpating species, upon which its vital functions depend, or by any other insults or dislocations.

The conclusion of this argument, as that of our paradigm, may, of course, be avoided by denying or discounting either or both its premises. Theologians might, for example, deny (1b); Newtonian mechanists (1a). There is a recent and alarming tendency by industrialists, thoughtless consumers, and their political allies to follow one of the stratagems available to the smoking teenager in our simple sample argument respecting premise (2), for presently we all too often hear that although human life, health, and happiness for ourselves, in the future for our children, their children, and so on, is something for which everyone has a positive sentiment, uninterrupted economic growth and profligate consumption, i.e., maintenance of "the American way of life," is something for which we have a greater passion.¹⁵ This is formally similar to the smoking teenager's rejoinder that she simply places greater priority on the immediate pleasures of cigarette smoking than upon future health and long life. More cynically still, we sometimes hear the rhetorical question, "What, after all, has posterity ever done for me?"

V

So far, we have only defended the relevancy of ecology and the environmental sciences to an essentially prudential and utilitarian version of environmen-

¹⁵ For a particularly candid, indeed unabashed, statement of this sort of attitude see Gene Spitzer, "Sensible Environmental Principles for the Future," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 339-52.

tal ethics. There is a more radical and metaethically more challenging aspect of Leopold's land ethic. Indeed, the novel and interesting feature of Leopold's land ethic is the extension of *direct moral standing*, of moral considerability, or of primary moral status, to "soils, waters, plants, and animals."¹⁶ This, as he himself insists, goes beyond "enlightened self-interest," i.e., beyond prudence, even if we construe prudence in the most expansive sense possible to include our *collective human* well-being, for the present generation and for generations to come.¹⁷ Furthermore, this novel biocentric ethic, which in a single stroke "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it [and] implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for the community as such,"¹⁸ is also represented as a shift of values which is supposed to *follow from* ecological enlightenment!

Ironically, Hume, usually regarded as the nemesis of any attempt to discover values in facts and, *a fortiori*, any proposal to change values upon the discovery of *new* facts, once more provides a classical, metaethical model which justifies Leopold's more radical claims. Let us recall again the first of the two ways, according to Hume, that reason can have an influence on our conduct, *viz.*, "when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it."

According to Hume, for the purpose of moral analysis the passions may be divided into two classes, those concerning oneself and those extending to others, and the latter are no less motives to action than the former.¹⁹ Moreover, human beings, Hume points out, are, as a matter of fact, thoroughly dependent upon society and there exists a certain sentiment which *naturally* resides in us for what he frequently calls the "publick interest," i.e., for the commonweal or for the integrity of society *per se*.²⁰

Now, a moralist may legitimately use reason to excite any of these passions in us and thus influence our actions. For example, opponents of abortion present medical evidence to show that a fetus only five months after conception has all the outward physical features, circulatory and nervous systems, and internal organs of a human being. They wish us to conclude that the fetus is a proper object of those of our moral sympathies which are naturally excited by human beings, especially by human infants.

Leopold makes use of an analogous ploy in the "Shack Sketches" of *A Sand County Almanac* when he represents other animals anthropomorphically: amorous woodcocks sky dancing, mouse engineers fretting, bird dogs patiently educating their smell-deficient masters in the fine art of olfactory discrimination, etc., etc. Leopold's anthropomorphism is always restrained by and

¹⁶ Leopold, *Sand County*, p. 204.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁹ Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 486-87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 484-85.

confined to the ecological facts of the animal behavior he describes. The mouse engineer is not equipped with a transit, nor does the woodcock present his lady with an engagement ring. Unlike Kenneth Grahame in *Wind in the Willows*, Leopold does not dress his animals in morning coats and sit them at table for tea and biscuits. Nonetheless, Leopold tries to excite our sympathy and fellow feeling by portraying animal behavior as in many ways similar to our own and as motivated by similar psychological experiences.

The land ethic depends in large measure upon this logically quite legitimate influence of science on our human psychological responses. As Leopold directly says:

It is a century now since Darwin gave us the first glimpse of the origin of species. We know now what was unknown to all the preceding caravan of generations: that men are only fellow-voyagers with other creatures in the odyssey of evolution. This new *knowledge* should have given us by this time a *sense of kinship* [i.e., it should have excited our sentiment of sympathy or fellow feeling] *with fellow-creatures*; a wish to live and let live; a sense of wonder over the magnitude and duration of the biotic enterprise.²¹

To expose its Humean legitimacy this argument may be schematically set out as follows: (1) we (i.e., all psychologically normal people) are endowed with certain moral sentiments (sympathy, concern, respect, and so on) for our fellows, especially for our kin; (2) modern biology treats *Homo sapiens* (a) as, like all other living species, a product of the process of organic evolution; and hence, (b) people are literally kin (because of common ancestry) to all other contemporary forms of life; (3) therefore, if so enlightened, we should feel and thus behave (I here assume as I have throughout Hume's interpretively undisputed general theory of action) toward other living things in ways similar to the way we feel and thus behave toward our human kin.²²

Ignoring the more collective or holistic object of the feeling of wonder—the whole biotic enterprise, its magnitude and duration—to which Leopold refers in his informal derivation of the moral implications of the theory of evolution, we are led beyond humanism and animal liberationism to what I have elsewhere labeled “the reverence-for-life ethic.”²³ But we have not yet reached “soils and waters.”

²¹ Leopold, *Sand County*, p. 109 (emphasis added).

²² I have reversed the order of the premises (1) and (2) in the general format as previously employed in deference to MacIntyre's discussion, “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought,’” which refers to a suppressed “major premise” which appropriately formulates an agent's sentiments. In the previous examples the premise containing reference to the agent(s)' feelings(s) was indexed “(2)” since it was in fact suppressed and “bridged” the *is* premise and the *ought* conclusion.

²³ J. Baird Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 319, n. 21. It has been traditionally associated with Albert Schweitzer and recently systematically expounded by Kenneth Goodpaster, “On Being Morally Considerable,” *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978): 308–25.

VI

The Leopold land ethic *per se* rests, more formally, upon the ecological concept of a biotic community.²⁴ Ecology, Leopold points out, represents living nature as a biotic community, i.e., as a *society* of plants, animals, minerals, fluids, and gases. This is a genuinely novel conception of nature. Prior to the emergence of the science of ecology, when natural history was largely a matter of taxonomy, nature was perceived more as a mere collection of objects, like a room full of furniture, the parts of which were incidentally and externally related. Natural things, thus, had either an indifferent value, a positive utilitarian resource value, or a negative value (as pests, weeds, vermin, and so on). Ecology has changed all this. It has brought into being a new natural paradigm. The natural world is now perceived as a living whole, "one humming community." The myriad species, previously conceived as haphazardly scattered upon an inert landscape, relating catch-as-catch-can, are now conceived as intimately conjoined, specifically adapted to one another, to types of soil and parameters of climate. Each species has a role in the economy of nature, a niche or, as it were, a profession. We human beings exist within this natural or biotic community; certainly we cannot exist outside it, on the moon or on Mars or indeed anywhere else except on Earth.

Now, as Hume observed, not only have we sympathy for our fellows, we also are naturally endowed with a sentiment, the proper object of which is society itself. Ecology and the environmental sciences thus inform us of the existence of something which is a proper object of one of our most fundamental moral passions. The biotic community is a proper object of that passion which is actuated by the contemplation of the complexity, diversity, integrity, and stability of the *community* to which we belong. Ecology, thus, has transformed the value of nature *as a whole* just as evolutionary biology has transformed the value of the components of nature severally. Leopold sums up his land ethic with the following moral precept: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."²⁵

This precept is derived from ecology and the environmental sciences. The derivation of this conclusion, in much the same way as that concerning cigarette smoking, falls within the strict confines of Hume's metaethics. Schematically arranged in a permutation of our familiar format, Leopold urges upon us the conclusion, (3) we ought to "preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." Why ought we? Because (1) we all generally have a positive attitude toward the community or society to which we belong; and (2) science has now discovered that the natural environment is a community

²⁴ Cf. Callicott, "Elements of an Environmental Ethic."

²⁵ Leopold, *Sand County*, pp. 224-25.

or society to which we belong, no less than to the human global village. Like the conclusion, "one ought not smoke cigarettes," it infers *ought* from *is* and derives value from fact (actually from a theoretical arrangement of natural facts, on the one hand, and from certain psychological facts, on the other.)

If Hume's analysis is essentially correct, ecology and the environmental sciences *can* thus directly change our values: *what* we value, not *how* we value. They do not, in other words, change our inherited capacity for moral discrimination and response, nor do they change the specific profile of our human moral sentiments or passions (these change, if they change at all, only through an evolutionary process, i.e., through random variation, natural selection, etc.).²⁶ Rather, ecology changes our values by changing our *concepts* of the world and of ourselves in relation to the world. It reveals new relations among objects which, once revealed, stir our ancient centers of moral feeling.

²⁶ Hume himself, of course, did not discuss the evolution of the moral sentiments or passions. He wrote before Darwin and the evolutionary habit of mind. However, see Anthony Flew's comment in *Evolutionary Ethics*, p. 59.

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System (1980–2001): An Overview and Critique¹

Y. S. Lo

University of Western Australia

This article analyzes the evolution of the land ethic re-presented by J. Baird Callicott over the last two decades under pressure from the charge of misanthropy and ecofascism. It also traces the development of Callicott's own ethical system, and examines its most current phase both in itself and in relation to his other theoretical commitments, including his particular version of moral monism, and his communitarian critique of egalitarianism. It concludes that Callicott's communitarianism is by itself insufficient to fund an adequate environmental ethic, and that for the sake of self-consistency he should either discard his moral monism or else further revise his ethical system.

I. Introduction

Over the last two decades, J. Baird Callicott has advocated and defended the land ethic outlined by Aldo Leopold² half a century ago. Suppose a correct appeal to established authorities can give some confirmatory support to a recently devised theory such as the land ethic. Then, on the other side of the same coin, the incompatibility of the theory with established authorities can equally discredit it. For example, if David Hume's philosophy is, as Callicott takes it, an authority the appeal to which can properly support the land ethic to a certain extent, then the fact that Callicott's land-ethical holism is un-Humean (as I have argued elsewhere)³ actually reduces its acceptability to that same extent.

Whether the land ethic re-presented by Callicott (or, for that matter, any other applied ethic) is an adequate ethical position, however, depends not merely on whether it has some prominent figures as its historical predecessors. More importantly, the adequacy of the position is to be assessed in terms of its own content and implications. It is just such an assessment that I undertake in the present article. Furthermore, I shall examine the whole ethical system currently advocated by him, of which the land ethic is a dependent part.

For simplicity, I shall hereafter use the term 'the land ethic' followed by a date to refer to the land ethic re-presented by Callicott at that time, unless otherwise indicated.

332 Y. S. Lo

II. The Land Ethic (1980)

Some of Callicott's earliest expository statements on the land ethic are found in his now well-known article 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair' published in 1980. For example, he writes:

Aldo Leopold [(1949, pp. 224–5)] provides a concise statement of what might be called the categorical imperative or principal precept of the land ethic: 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.' What is especially noteworthy, and that to which attention should be directed in this proposition, is the idea that the good of the biotic *community* is the *ultimate* measure of the moral value, the rightness or wrongness, of actions. ... In *every* case the effect upon ecological systems is the *decisive* factor in the determination of the ethical quality of actions.⁴

Because Callicott calls the good of the biotic community the 'ultimate' measure and the 'decisive' factor in determining the moral rightness or wrongness of actions in 'every case', it is reasonable to interpret him as taking the land ethic to prescribe an *absolute* direct moral duty to protect the good of the biotic community, to which any other good *always* ought to be subordinated. A straightforward implication of the land ethic is, therefore, that the good of an individual ought to be sacrificed whenever that is needed for the protection of the good of the biotic community. To use an example from Callicott:

[T]o hunt and kill a white-tailed deer in certain districts may not only be ethically permissible, it might actually be a moral requirement, necessary to protect the local environment, taken as a whole, from the disintegrating effects of a cervid population explosion.⁵

Some might want to read the above passage as meaning: 'If culling a white-tailed deer is necessary for the protection of the good of a biotic community, then it "might" be a moral requirement to do so.' But this reading, I think, understates the implication of the land ethic 1980 on how individual members of the biotic community should be treated. For, as Callicott puts it, what is 'especially noteworthy, and that to which attention should be directed' in the land ethic's 'principal precept' is the idea that in 'every case' the good of the biotic community is the 'ultimate' measure of the ethical qualities of actions. This means, as I have already explained, that the land-ethical duty to protect the good of the biotic community is not negotiable even if its execution requires sacrificing other goods. Hence, I read the passage as meaning: 'It "might" be the case that culling a white-tailed deer is necessary for the protection of the good of a biotic community; and if that is actually the case, then it *is* a moral requirement to cull the white-tailed deer.' Furthermore, this

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 333

reading is in line with the following expository statement from Callicott on the land ethic, which appears in the concluding paragraph of the same article under consideration. He writes:

The land ethic [...] is eminently practicable, since, by reference to a *single good*, competing individual claims may be adjudicated and relative values and priorities assigned to the myriad components of the biotic community. [...] it provides a unified and coherent practical principle and thus a decision procedure at the practical level [...]⁶

This 'single good' advocated by the land ethic 1980, no doubt, refers to the holistic good of the biotic community. In other words, the holistic biotic good is the *one and only one* good which all land-ethical actions aim to serve. Hence, if culling an individual is necessary for the protection of this one and only one land-ethical good, then it *is* (not just might be) a land-ethical requirement to do so.

Then, what is the place for the good of the individual in the land ethic 1980? In the passage just cited, Callicott talks about individuals as having 'relative values' assigned by the land ethic. What exactly are these 'relative values'? He writes:

The land ethic manifestly does not accord equal *moral* worth to each and every member of the biotic community; the *moral* worth of individuals (including, take note, *human* individuals) is *relative*, to be assessed in accordance with the particular relation of each to the collective entity which Leopold called the 'land'.⁷

Given this statement from Callicott, it is clear that he thinks of the 'relative' values or worth assigned by the land ethic to individuals as belonging to the 'moral' kind. But the question is whether he can coherently think so. Consider the following passage from the same 1980 article, where Callicott compares the land ethic with Plato's moral and social philosophy in terms of their 'holistic posture'.⁸ He writes:

[T]wo of the same analogies figuring in the conceptual foundations of the Leopold land ethic appear in Plato's value theory. From the ecological perspective, according to Leopold [...], land is like an organic body or like a human society. According to Plato, body, soul, and society have similar structures and corresponding virtues. The goodness of each is a function of its structure or organization and the *relative value of the parts or constituents* of each is calculated according to the *contribution* made to the integrity, stability, and beauty of each *whole*. [...] Plato, indeed, seems to regard individual human life and certainly human pain and suffering with complete indifference. On the other hand, he shrinks from nothing so long as it seems to him to be in the interest of the community. [...] When challenged with the complaint that he is

334 Y. S. Lo

ignoring individual human happiness [...], he replies that it is the *well-being of the community as a whole*, not that of any person or special class at which his legislation aims.⁹

Now, whether or not what Callicott says about Plato is accurate, its implication for the land ethic is very clear, namely: it is the 'well-being of the [biotic] community as a whole', not that of any of its individual members, at which the land ethic aims; and the 'relative' worth assigned by the land ethic to an individual is calculated according to the individual's 'contribution' to the holistic good of the biotic community. It follows that when one's contribution to the holistic biotic good is relatively high/low, then one's worth is relatively high/low. Such 'relative' worth of the individual, in other words, is relative to the individual's *usefulness as a means* to further the holistic biotic good, which is taken by the land ethic as the 'ultimate' end-in-itself. As such, the so-called relative worth of the individual is nothing more than an instrumental value. Hence, *pace* Callicott, the worth assigned by the land ethic to individuals can hardly be called 'moral worth'. Furthermore, because this 'relative' instrumental worth is the only kind of worth assigned to individuals by the land ethic, it is therefore not so much as Callicott suggests that the land ethic 1980 'does not accord equal moral worth to each and every member of the biotic community', but rather that it does not accord any moral worth to any individual at all.¹⁰ Likewise, neither does it accord any moral considerability¹¹ to any individual. For the considerations that it gives to individuals are all derived from their prospects of serving the holistic good of the biotic community. Such derivative considerability of the individual can hardly be said to belong to the moral kind.

Now, because the land ethic advocated by Callicott's 1980 article has no place for the moral value and moral considerability of individuals – 'including, take note, *human* individuals', it is not difficult to make sense of (although not justify) the following passage from the same article, which 'otherwise might appear to be gratuitous misanthropy'.¹² Callicott writes:

The biospheric [and, presumably, also the land-ethical] perspective does not exempt *Homo sapiens* from moral evaluation in relation to the well-being of the community of nature taken as a whole. The preciousness of individual deer, as of any other specimen, is inversely proportional to the population of the species. [...] As omnivores, the population of human beings should, perhaps, be roughly twice that of bears, allowing for differences of size. A global population of more than four billion persons and showing no signs of an orderly decline [...] is at present a global disaster [...] for the biotic community. [...] The extent of misanthropy in modern environmentalism thus may be taken as a measure of the degree to which it is biocentric [and, presumably, land-ethical as well]. Edward Abbey [...] states that he would sooner shoot a man than a snake. Abbey may not be simply depraved; this is perhaps only his way

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 335

of dramatically making the point that the human population has become so disproportionate from the biological point of view that if one had to choose between a specimen of *Homo sapiens* and a specimen of a rare even if unattractive species, the choice would be moot.¹³

Now, whether or not the choice in question is moot for Abbey, it is clear for the land ethic 1980, namely: if a land-ethical person had to choose between saving a specimen of the over-populated *Homo sapiens* and saving a specimen of a rare species, it would be the latter. This is because:

P1. The 'preciousness' (or, more precisely, the instrumental value, which is the only kind of 'preciousness') of 'any' specimen is 'inversely proportional to the population of the species' (from the land ethical perspective 1980).

P2. The population of *Homo sapiens* is larger than the population of a rare species.

P3. The 'preciousness' of a human being is lower than that of a specimen of a rare species (from P1, P2).

Furthermore:

P4. *Homo sapiens* is more over-populated than any other species on the land.

Hence, from the land-ethical perspective 1980:

P5. The 'preciousness' of a human being is the lowest among all the specimens of different species on the land, rare or otherwise (from P1, P4).

Now, recall that the land ethic 1980 maintains:

P6. It is a 'moral requirement' to cull a white-tailed deer if that is 'necessary to protect the local environment, taken as a whole, from the disintegrating effects of a cervid population explosion'.

But the fact is:

P7. The 'disintegrating effects' on the environment caused by human population explosion are greater than that caused by the population explosion of any other species.

So the land ethic 1980 implies:

P8. It is a 'moral requirement' to cull a human being if that is necessary to protect the local environment from the disintegrating effects of human

336 Y. S. Lo

population explosion; and this moral requirement is the strongest among all the moral requirements of the same kind (from P5, P6, P7).

This remarkably misanthropic implication, not surprisingly, has been widely criticized and regarded as a *reductio* of the land ethic 1980. Tom Regan in his *The Case for Animal Rights*, for example, has condemned the holistic land ethic's disregard of the rights of the individual as 'environmental fascism'. Regan writes:

The implications of [the land ethic's moral precept] include the clear prospect that the individual may be sacrificed for the greater biotic good, in the name of 'the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community'. It is difficult to see how the notion of *the rights of the individual* could find a home within a view that, emotive connotations to one side, might be fairly dubbed 'environmental fascism'. To use Leopold's telling phrase, man is '*only* a member of the biotic team', and as such has the same moral standing as any other 'member' of 'the team'. If, to take an extreme, fanciful but, it is hoped, not unfair example, the situation we face was either to kill a rare wildflower or a (plentiful) human being, and if the wildflower, as a 'team member', would contribute more to 'the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community' than the human, then presumably we would not be doing wrong if we killed the human and saved the wildflower.^{14, 15}

Indeed, if killing a human being in order to save a wildflower would contribute more to the good of the biotic community than the other way round, then from the land-ethical perspective 1980 not only would that be morally permissible (i.e. 'not be ... wrong') as Regan disapprovingly points out. It would, as we have seen, actually be a 'moral requirement' as Callicott favorably states. Furthermore, not only does the land ethic 1980 have no place for the notion of 'the rights of the individual', which is central to Regan's ethic of animal rights. But, as I have explained earlier, it also has no place for the wider notions of the moral value and moral considerability of the individual – rights-holding or otherwise, human or otherwise.

In short, there are two implications of the land ethic 1980, which can separately invite the charge of ecofascism. They are:

C1. The biotic community *per se* is the sole locus of moral value and moral considerability, which are completely absent from individuals.

C2. It is an absolute moral duty to protect the holistic good (or well-being) of the biotic community, to which the goods (e.g. welfare, interest, preference) of individuals always ought to be subordinated.

It is quite clear that C1 is a stronger claim than C2. For one party's possession of moral value and moral considerability coupled with another party's

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 337

complete lack of them arguably suggests that the good (if any) of the latter always ought to be subordinated to that of the former. But the reverse is not true. For even if one party's good always ought to be subordinated to that of another party, the former may still possess some moral value and moral considerability but just in a lower degree than that possessed by the latter.

The distinction between the above two moral claims endorsed by the land ethic 1980 will be helpful to the following discussion of Callicott's evolving exposition of the land ethic and his defense of it against the charge of ecofascism.

III. The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System (1986–1994)

The 1987 article 'The Conceptual Foundation of the Land Ethic' has been considered by Callicott as representing his 'best effort' to 'present the land ethic in full philosophical regalia'.¹⁶ Consider the following expository passage from the article on the land ethic's holism:

The most salient feature of Leopold's land ethic is its provision of [...] 'moral considerability' for the biotic community per se, not just for fellow members of the biotic community. [...] The land ethic, thus, has a holistic as well as an individualistic cast. [...] The land ethic not only provides moral considerability for the biotic community per se, but ethical consideration of its individual members is *preempted* by concern for the preservation of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. The land ethic, thus, not only has a holistic aspect; it is *holistic with a vengeance*.¹⁷

Now, Callicott speaks of the land ethic as providing 'moral considerability' to individual members of the biotic community and thus having 'an individualistic cast'. And somewhere else in the same article he says that 'fellow members of the biotic community ... deserve respect'.¹⁸ So it appears that the land ethic 1987, unlike its former self 1980, no longer advocates **C1**, the complete disallowance for the moral value and moral considerability of the individual. However, Callicott also speaks of the ethical consideration given to individuals as being '*preempted* by concern for the preservation of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community'. So it appears that the land ethic 1987 still advocates **C2**, the absolute subordination of individual goods to the holistic good of the biotic community. **C2**, as we have seen, is a weaker claim than **C1**. But on its own it still implies the misanthropic and ecofascist view that it is morally permissible (or even required) to cull human individuals if that is necessary for the protection of the holistic biotic good. Accordingly, it appears that the land ethic 1987 is still susceptible to the charge of ecofascism to the extent that it endorses **C2**.

Interestingly, however, in the same 1987 article Callicott offers a response

338 Y. S. Lo

on behalf of the land ethic to the charge, and argues that it is not ecofascist. He writes:

From the biosocial evolutionary analysis of ethics upon which Leopold builds the land ethic, it (the land ethic) *neither replaces nor overrides* previous [ethical] accretions. Prior moral sensibilities and obligations attendant upon and corrective to prior strata of social involvement *remain operative and preemptive*. [...] our recognition of the biotic community and our immersion in it does not imply that we do not also remain members of the human community – the ‘family of man’ or ‘global village’ – or that we are relieved of the attendant and correlative moral responsibilities of that membership, among them to respect universal human rights and uphold the principles of individual human worth and dignity. [...] Moreover, as a *general rule*, the duties correlative to the inner social circles to which we belong eclipse those correlative to the rings further from the heartwood when conflicts arise. [...] Family obligations *in general* come before nationalistic duties and humanitarian obligations *in general* come before environmental duties. The land ethic, therefore, is *not draconian or fascist*. It does not cancel human morality.¹⁹

Before commenting on Callicott’s defense of the land ethic against the charge of ecofascism, I would like first to deal with some immediate puzzles brought about by the above passage.

1. *First Few Puzzles: On Consistency*

In the above passage, Callicott maintains:

(1) [The land ethic] neither replaces nor overrides previous [ethical] accretions. Prior moral sensibilities and obligations [e.g. the duty ‘to respect universal human rights and uphold the principles of individual human worth and dignity’] attendant upon and correlative to prior strata of social involvement [e.g. our membership in the human ‘global village’] *remain operative and preemptive*.

But, as we have seen, Callicott also maintains:

(2) [E]thical consideration of its [the biotic community’s] individual members is *preempted* by concern for the preservation of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.²⁰

Now, apply both (1) and (2) to the case of human beings. According to (1), because some ethic of ‘universal human rights’ and ‘individual human worth and dignity’ is an accretion prior to the more recently devised land ethic, the former’s individualistic concern for human beings is ‘preemptive’ and therefore preempts the latter’s holistic concern for the biotic community. But human beings are ‘individual members’ of the biotic community. Hence.

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 339

according to (2), concern for human individuals 'is preempted by concern for the preservation of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community'. Consequently, it follows from (1) together with (2) that individualistic concern for human beings preempts but is also preempted by the holistic concern for the biotic community.

How to make sense of this apparent inconsistency between (1) and (2), both of which appear in the same 1987 article under consideration? I suppose the best reading of them, which makes them most consistent with each other, is as follows:

(2) From the perspective of the land ethic 1987: concern for individual members of the biotic community is '*preempted*' by concern for the preservation of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community'.

(1) *From the perspective of Callicott's whole ethical system 1987, which contains many different ethical 'accretions': 'Prior moral sensibilities and obligations attendant upon and correlative to prior strata of social involvement remain operative and preemptive.'*

Now, it follows from (2) that *land-ethical* concerns for individual members of the biotic community are preempted by the land-ethical holistic concern for the biotic community. But it does not follow that *other* – i.e. *non-land-ethical* – ethical concerns for individuals are preempted by the land-ethical holistic concern. In other words, (2) allows the possibility that although an individual is a member of the biotic community, there is some non-land-ethical but none the less ethical concern for the individual, which is not preempted by but instead overrides the land-ethical holistic concern for the biotic community. Hence, (2) is compatible with (1).

Now, the puzzle regarding the internal consistency of the land ethic 1987 has been resolved. Its resolution, however, has made explicit the fact that the land ethic 1987 is just one component of a much larger ethical system. In other words, land-ethical considerations no longer constitute all ethical considerations. So a land-ethical action may not be an ethically right action all things considered. As such, the land ethic 1987 prescribes no absolute moral duty whatsoever and *a fortiori* no absolute moral duty to protect the good of the biotic community. Hence, unlike its former self 1980, the land ethic 1987 no longer advocates **C2**, the absolute subordination to the holistic biotic good. Rather, it has retreated to a much weaker claim:

C3. It is a *prima facie* moral duty to protect the holistic good of the biotic community, to which the goods of individuals occasionally ought to be subordinated.

By and large, the endorsement of **C3** is a core feature of the land ethic

340 Y. S. Lo

advocated by Callicott from 1986 onwards. For example, in his 1986 article 'The Search of an Environmental Ethic', he writes:

The land ethic is the *latest step* in an evolutionary sequence [...] Each succeeding step in social-moral evolution – from the savage clan to the family of man – *does not cancel or invalidate* the earlier stages. Rather, each succeeding stage is layered over the earlier ones, which remain operative.²¹

Likewise, in his 1988 article 'Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again', Callicott writes:

[O]ur holistic environmental obligations are *not preemptive*. We are still subject to all the other more particular and individually oriented duties to the members of our various more circumscribed and intimate communities.²²

Likewise, in his 1994 'Preface' to a reprint of his 1980 article 'Triangular Affair', Callicott writes:

The biotic community and its correlative land ethic *does not replace* our several human communities and their correlative ethics [...] Rather it *supplements* them. Hence, the land ethic leaves our traditional human morality quite intact and pre-emptive.²³

In short, the evolution of the land ethic from its early self 1980 to its later self 1986–94 consists in a rejection of **C1** (the complete disallowance for the moral value and moral standing of the individual)²⁴ and then a retreat from the weaker claim **C2** (the absolute subordination of the individual to the holistic biotic good) to the even weaker claim **C3** (the occasional subordination of the individual to the holistic biotic good). Consequently, the misanthropic and ecofascist implications of the land ethic 1980, which are the direct results of **C1** and **C2**, can no longer be derived from the land ethic 1986–94.

One obvious question to ask now is whether Callicott has abandoned the land ethic displayed in his 1980 'Triangular Affair'. Let us consider the following response from Callicott a decade afterwards. He writes:

In 'Triangular Affair' I even argued that the worth of individual *human* beings must, *if one acceded to a demand for ruthless consistency*, be measured against Leopold's holistic summum bonum, and suggested that its degree of misanthropy might be the litmus test of whether a stance or policy was in agreement with the land ethic. *I never actually endorsed such a position*. It is obnoxious and untenable. And I now *no longer* think that misanthropic prescriptions can be deduced from the Leopold land ethic as I have subsequently explained (Callicott 1986, 1987 [...]). I certainly feel that we have duties and obligations to fellow humans (and to humanity as a whole) that

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 341

supersede the land ethic, although *I have by no means abandoned the land ethic.*²⁵

The reason why Callicott from 1986 onwards quite rightly '*no longer think[s]*' that misanthropic prescriptions can be deduced from the Leopold land ethic' is, as we have seen, because the land ethic re-presented by him from 1986 onwards no longer advocates C1 or C2. But what does Callicott mean when he says he '*never actually endorsed such a position*'? Does he mean: '*if*' an advocate of the land ethic 1980 'acceded to a demand for ruthless consistency', then the advocate 'must' endorse the position that 'the worth of individual human beings' is to be 'measured against Leopold's holistic summum bonum'. But *he* (Callicott) '*never actually endorsed such a position*'. Therefore, (1) he was never ruthless, and/or (2) he was never consistent, and/or (3) he was never an actual advocate of the land ethic 1980 when he apparently advocated it? . . . I shall leave you to work out your own answer and its implications especially if (3) is part of it.

In any case, the land ethic 1980 itself (i.e. regardless of whether or not Callicott has actually advocated it) is a *self-contained* ethical theory because it takes the holistic good of the biotic community as the 'single good' and the 'ultimate measure' of right and wrong, and thus provides one 'unified and coherent practical principle', and therefore is said to be 'eminently practicable'.²⁶ The land ethic 1986–94, however, is a *constituent part* – actually the most marginal constituent part (the 'latest step',²⁷ the 'outermost "accretion"')²⁸ – of a much larger ethical system, which advocates many different and possibly conflicting goods and measures of right and wrong, and the practicability of which is therefore unclear. Putting this another way: just as the originally misanthropic and ecofascist quality of the evolving land ethic has been diluted through its being swallowed up by a larger system, its originally eminent practicability also has been undermined through the very same process.

In short, it may or may not be true that Callicott has '*by no means abandoned the land ethic*' displayed in his 1980 'Triangular Affair' – depending on how much repositioning it can endure before losing its original identity and also whether he has ever actually committed himself to it. But it is certainly true that from 1986 onwards Callicott has marginalized the land ethic due to his many-angular affair²⁹ with the other 'accretions' in his ethical system.

2. *Second Few Puzzles: On Practicability*

Consider C3 again, which is endorsed by the land ethic 1986–94. According to C3, it is a *prima facie* moral duty to protect the holistic good of the biotic community, to which the individual goods *occasionally* ought to be subordinated.

342 Y. S. Lo

On what occasions, then, should an individual good be subordinated to the holistic biotic good? An immediate answer: only on occasions where an individual good conflicts with the holistic biotic good but no other ethical accretion in Callicott's system 1986–94 prescribes any moral duty to protect that individual good, which overrides the moral duty prescribed by the land-ethical accretion to protect the holistic biotic good.

This answer is directly derived from the meaning of the phrase 'prima facie moral duty' in C3. And it does not help to determine whether a given occasion belongs to the kind of occasions identified by it. Trivial and unhelpful though it be, it at least shows that if the land ethic 1986–94, or for that matter any other ethical accretion in Callicott's ethical system 1986–94, is to be practicable, then the system needs to provide its users with some method to prioritize the many different moral duties prescribed by its many different ethical accretions. The problem of prioritization, as Gary Varner pointed out back in 1991, is 'a problem which, unless and until Callicott answers it, utterly trivializes the land ethic'.³⁰

Then, what would the prioritizing method in question be like? It might take the form of a detailed catalogue which identifies the particular content, and lists the comparative priority, of every moral duty prescribed by the system. Or it might take the form of an abstract formula the application of which to whatever turns out to be a moral duty prescribed by the system will determine its comparative priority. As you may recall, something like an abstract formula of prioritization is provided by the 1987 time-slice of Callicott's ethical system, namely:

[The] *general* rule [... that] the duties correlative to the inner social circles to which we belong eclipse those correlative to the rings further from the heartwood when conflicts arise. [... For example:] Family obligations *in general* come before nationalistic duties and humanitarian obligations *in general* come before environmental duties.³¹

This 'general rule' explicitly provided by the 1987 time-slice of Callicott's ethical system is also implicitly endorsed by its 1986, 1988, and 1990 time-slices.³²

Now, 'in general' can mean 'in most cases' or 'in all cases'.³³ Then, how 'general' is Callicott's 'general rule'? According to him:

The land ethic may, however, as with any new accretion, demand choices which affect, in turn, the demands of the more interior social-ethical circles. Taxes and the military draft may conflict with family-level obligations. While the land ethic, certainly, does not cancel human morality, neither does it leave it unaffected.³⁴

In other words, 'Family obligations in general [i.e. in most cases] come before

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 343

nationalistic duties'. But there may be exceptional cases, for instance: 'Taxes and military draft may conflict with' and, presumably, may also eclipse, some 'family-level obligations'. Accordingly, I read Callicott's 'general rule' as meaning: '*In most cases*, "[t]he duties correlative to the inner social circles to which we belong eclipse those correlative to the rings further from the heartwood when conflicts arise".' Then, exactly in what cases does Callicott's 'general rule' apply or not apply?

It is, I admit, too demanding to require any ethical system merely based on *common sense* to get down to every last detail about how its more or less general moral rule(s) should apply. Common-sense morality, as we all know, is not strict or exact in its details.

But is Callicott's 'general rule' common-sensical? I suppose a common-sensical version of it would be something like the following: '*Other things being equal*, "[t]he duties correlative to the inner social circles to which we belong eclipse those correlative to the rings further from the heartwood when conflicts arise".' But I suppose common sense does *not* suggest that things other than the distance of a social circle from the 'heartwood' are equal *in most cases* (or, if you like, 'in general'). So I suppose Callicott's 'general rule' is not common-sensical.

Hence, we may go back to the previous question: exactly in what cases does the 'general rule' apply or not apply?

The first response from Callicott to the request for a substantial method of prioritizing the various moral duties prescribed by his system, to my knowledge, appears in his 1994 article 'Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended'.³⁵ He says:

[H]ow can we deal with our many and very different moral concerns without resorting to pluralism? I suggest that we adopt a form of communitarianism. At once, each of us is a member of a family, a civic society, a nation state, the global village, Midgleyan 'mixed communities' (that include domestic animals), and local, regional, and global biotic communities. Each of these memberships generates peculiar duties and obligations. [...] The ethical obligations generated by our many community memberships often conflict, but since all our duties – to people, to animals, to nature – are expressible in a common vocabulary, the vocabulary of community, they may be weighed and compared in *commensurable terms*. [...] communitarianism allows one to weigh one's duties on a *single scale, calibrated in a single metric*, and attempt to balance them fairly.^{36, 37}

But exactly what are those 'commensurable terms' and that 'single scale, calibrated in a single metric'? Callicott does not say. Instead, he says:

Of all those who have reacted to my case against moral pluralism, Peter Wenz has been the most understanding. [...] But Wenz's interpretation (1993: 72) of me

344 Y. S. Lo

(Callicott)] suggests a formalization of the process of weighing and balancing the various duties and obligations generated by our many community memberships with which *I myself feel a trifle uncomfortable*.^{38, 39}

Now, why Callicott feels 'a trifle uncomfortable' with Wenz's suggestion is unknown. But his failure to formalize or, in other words, substantialize a process of weighing the various possibly conflicting duties prescribed by his ethical system 1986–94 clearly shows that the system has no substantial solution (and *a fortiori* no substantial monistic solution based on 'a single scale, calibrated in a single metric') to the problem of prioritization – a problem which, as we have seen, jeopardizes the practicability of the system as a whole and also the practicability of each of its constituent accretions, land-ethical or otherwise.

IV. The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System (1999–2001)

Let us now turn to the most recent phase of the land ethic. Like its earlier self 1986–94, the land ethic 1999–2001 endorses C3, the occasional subordination of individual goods to the holistic good of the biotic community. This is because, like the relation of its earlier self to Callicott's earlier ethical system, the land ethic 1999–2001 is one (and still the 'outermost' one) of the many constituent accretions of his ethical system 1999–2001. For example, in both his 1999 article 'Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism' and his 2001 article 'The Land Ethic',⁴⁰ Callicott reiterates this now familiar point:

Leopold refers to the various stages of ethical development – from tribal mores to universal human rights and, finally, to the land ethic – as 'accretions.' Accretion means an 'increase by external addition or accumulation'. The land ethic is an accretion – that is, an addition – to our several accumulated social ethics, not something that is supposed to replace them.⁴¹

The difference between Callicott's ethical system 1999–2001 and its earlier self 1986–94, however, is that it has finally come up with some clear means to prioritize the various possibly conflicting duties prescribed by its various ethical accretions. Callicott writes:

[A]s Shrader-Frechette (1996, 63) points out, the land ethic must provide 'second-order ethical principles and a priority ranking system that specifies the respective conditions under which [first-order] holistic and individualistic ethical principles ought to be recognized'. Leopold provides no such second-order principles for prioritizing among first-order principles, but they can be easily derived from the communitarian foundations of the land ethic. By

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 345

combining two second-order principles we can achieve a priority ranking among first-order principles, when, in a given quandary, they conflict. The first second-order principle (SOP-1) is that obligations generated by membership in more *venerable and intimate communities* take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities. [...] The second second-order principle (SOP-2) is that stronger *interests* (for lack of a better word) generate duties that take precedence over duties generated by weaker interests.⁴²

Thus, when holistic environment-oriented duties are in direct conflict with individualistic human-oriented duties, [according to SOP-1] the human oriented duties take priority. The land ethic is, therefore, not a case of ecofascism. [...] When the indication determined by the application of SOP-1 is reinforced by the application of SOP-2, an agent's choice is clear. When the indication determined by the application of SOP-1 is contradicted by the application of SOP-2, an agent's choice is equally clear: *SOP-2 countermands SOP-1*. Thus, when holistic environment-oriented duties are in conflict with individualistic human-oriented duties, and the holistic environmental interests at issue are significantly stronger than the individualistic human interests at issue, the former take priority.⁴³

In other words, Callicott's whole ethical system 1999–2001 consists of *three* orders (not two orders as he suggests) of moral principles. First, there are many different first-order principles prescribed by the many different ethical accretions of the system. Examples give by Callicott include: 'Honor thy Father and thy Mother; Love thy Country; Respect the Rights of All Human Beings Irrespective of Race, Creed, Color, or National Origin; Preserve the Integrity, Stability, and Beauty of the Biotic Community.'⁴⁴ Secondly, there are the two second-order principles, SOP-1 and SOP-2, for prioritizing the first-order ones when they happen to conflict. In addition, there is one *third-order* principle which says that 'SOP-2 countermands SOP-1' whenever the two happen to give contradictory second-order prescriptions. Call this third-order principle 'TOP'.

Now, because Callicott's ethical system 1999–2001 provides its users with quite a clear 'decision procedure' for prioritizing all the possibly conflicting moral principles generated by it, it seems quite practicable and is 'eminently [more] practicable' than its earlier self 1986–94.⁴⁵

A practicable ethical system, however, may not be a sound ethical system. In what follows, then, I shall examine Callicott's three-order ethical system 1999–2001 in more detail, both in itself and in relation to his other theoretical commitments, including his defense of the land ethic against the charge of ecofascism, his particular version of moral monism, and his communitarian critique of egalitarianism.

346 Y. S. Lo

1. SOP-1 Reformulated

Consider SOP-1, the first second-order principle in Callicott's ethical system 1999–2001: '[O]bligations generated by membership in more *venerable and intimate* communities take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities.' There are two problems, regarding the interpretation of SOP-1, that need to be addressed at the outset.

First of all, the term 'venerable' in SOP-1 can mean (1) worthy of reverence, or (2) worthy of reverence because of age, or simply (3) aged.⁴⁶ I suppose the term there is not intended to mean (1). For if so, SOP-1 would be in effect saying: 'obligations generated by membership in' communities that are more worthy of reverence and more intimate 'take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities'. Not controversial. But given that Callicott's ethical system supplies no independent procedure for determining the degree of a community's worthiness of reverence, SOP-1 thus interpreted would be useless for sorting out which first-order community-obligations in the system are to take precedence when conflicts arise. For similar reason, then, I suppose the term 'venerable' in SOP-1 is not intended to mean (2) either. So (3) is the only option remained. It is also the most appropriate option because the phrase 'more venerable ... communities' is used by Callicott himself as opposed to the phrase 'more recently emerged ... communities'. As a consequence of all these considerations, I read SOP-1 as saying: 'Obligations generated by membership in *older and more intimate* communities take precedence over those generated in *newer and less intimate* communities.' Now, the first problem regarding the interpretation of SOP-1 has been solved. But there is the second problem.

Consider the biotic community on the one hand and what Callicott calls the 'human global village' on the other. Both are communities of which we hold memberships. Our membership in the former generates holistic environment-oriented duties (e.g. 'to preserve its integrity, stability, and beauty'), whereas our membership in the latter generates individualistic human-oriented duties (e.g. 'to respect human rights').⁴⁷ Now, recall the result of Callicott's straightforward application of SOP-1 to settle conflicts between these two kinds of community-duties, namely: '[W]hen holistic environment-oriented duties are in direct conflict with individualistic human-oriented duties, the human oriented duties take priority. The land ethic is, therefore, not a case of ecofascism.'⁴⁸ This together with SOP-1 implies that the biotic community is a newer and less intimate community than the human global village. I suppose it is not controversial (or at least not controversial for those who have little direct contact and dealing with nature) that the biotic community is a less intimate community than the human global village. But it is simply false that the biotic community is a newer (or, in Callicott's words, 'less recently

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 347

emerged') community, of which we hold membership, than the human global village. For the arrival of *Homo sapiens* as members of the biotic community took place more than a hundred thousand years ago. But globalization (economical, political and/or ethical), which brings people from different places on the globe together to form the human global village, is a much more recent event.

Putting the problem in a more explicit and precise way. SOP-1 measures the priority of a given community-duty in terms of two quite different factors concurrently. They are (a) the age of the community, and (b) the degree of one's intimacy with the community. If both (a) and (b) are comparatively high/low, then according to SOP-1 the correlative community-duty has a comparatively high/low priority. But rather unfortunately, while (a) in the case of the biotic community is higher than (a) in the case of the human global village, (b) in the former case is lower than (b) in the latter case. And Callicott's ethical system supplies no 'single scale, calibrated in a single metric' to measure (a) and (b) jointly. As a consequence of all these, SOP-1 cannot be as straightforwardly applied as Callicott intends to sort out the priorities of conflicting environmental-oriented duties and human-oriented duties. As a further consequence, Callicott's defense of the land ethic in virtue of SOP-1 against the charge of ecofascism is impaired.

Very fortunately, however, the above problems can be avoided if SOP-1 is *reformulated* as the following:

Obligations generated by membership in communities to which one has *longer periods of recognition of one's belonging* and with which one is more intimate take precedence over those generated in communities to which one has shorter periods of recognition of one's belonging and with which one is less intimate.

SOP-1 thus reformulated measures the priority of a given first-order community-duty in terms of (a) the temporal length of one's recognition of one's membership in the community, and (b) the degree of one's intimacy with the community. Now, it is arguably true (or at least true for those who have little direct contact and dealing with nature) that (a) in the case of the biotic community is lesser than (a) in the case the human global village, and likewise that (b) in the former case is lesser than (b) in the latter case. Hence, unlike the original SOP-1, the reformulated SOP-1 can be straightforwardly applied to the familiar situation where holistic environment-oriented duties conflict with individualistic human-oriented duties. Furthermore, the result of its application matches that intended by Callicott, namely: when the two kinds of duties conflict, 'the human-oriented duties take priority'. Consequently, he can employ the reformulated SOP-1 to defend the land ethic against the charge of ecofascism. As a further bonus, it is quite plausible that the longer one has recognized one's membership in a community, the stronger

348 Y. S. Lo

one feels towards the community and its other members, and therefore the more intimate one is with the community. Hence, unlike that in the previous case, the variation of (a) and (b) in the present case is likely to be proportional across different communities. This then makes the application of the reformulated SOP-1 in general more straightforward than that of the original SOP-1.

Finally, the above reformulation of SOP-1 is also in line with Callicott's view that SOP-1 can be 'derived from the communitarian foundations of the land ethic'. For those 'communitarian foundations' are provided by what he sometimes calls the 'biosocial moral theory'⁴⁹ which maintains:

[T]he *perceived* boundaries of a society are also the perceived boundaries of its moral community.⁵⁰

Those who *acknowledge* their membership in [the] global human community also acknowledge moral obligations to all members of the community [...]⁵¹

Darwin [(1871) ...] anticipated the recent layering on of the human-animal community orbit. Quite appropriately so, since it was he who first suggested that we *conceptually reorganize* contemporary animals as members of a wider community or kinship group [...] Half a century later, Charles Elton [(1927) ...] suggested that we *conceive* of ecological relationships as uniting plants, animals, soil, airs, waters, and so on into 'biotic community'. Aldo Leopold (1949) simply plugged Elton's community concept in ecology into Darwin's analysis of the origin and evolution of ethics, and articulated a land or environmental ethic.⁵²

When we all *learn to 'see* land as a community to which we belong'... what results will be a land ethic that 'changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it'. (Leopold 1949, p. 204)⁵³

Accordingly, the 'biosocial moral theory' which provides the land ethic with its 'communitarian foundations' maintains: Development of various ethics goes parallel with and reflects the development of various *recognized* (or 'perceived') community-memberships. Hence, for the reason of coherency, when Callicott says that 'we feel the mores of more venerable and intimate communities to be more binding',⁵⁴ I read him as meaning: 'We feel the mores of the communities, which (a) we have longer periods of recognition of our membership in and (b) we are more intimate with, to be more binding.'

Now, let us put this biosocial-communitarian view from Callicott on our moral psychology *together with* his metaethical subjectivism which maintains: What has moral (i.e. non-instrumental) value is equivalent to what we value morally (i.e. non-instrumentally)⁵⁵ and analogously that what is morally more binding is equivalent to what we feel to be morally more binding. Then we can derive the reformulated SOP-1. Accordingly, instead

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 349

of saying that (the original) SOP-1 'can be easily derived from the communitarian foundations of the land ethic', it is more accurate to say that (the reformulated) SOP-1 can be derived partly 'from the communitarian foundations of the land ethic' and partly from Callicott's subjectivism which is on his view the metaethical foundation of the land ethic.⁵⁶

In short, the proposed reformulation of SOP-1 makes it (1) a better device for defending the land ethic against the particular charge of ecofascism, (2) more applicable in general, and (3) more coherent with what Callicott says about its connection with the biosocial-communitarian foundations of the land ethic. These are all to the good for his position. For the sake of sympathetic understanding, I assume that when he put forward the original version of SOP-1, he really intended the reformulated version. For simplicity, I shall use the term 'SOP-1' hereafter to refer to the reformulated SOP-1.

2. SOP-1, SOP-2, and Moral Monism

Let us turn to SOP-2, the second second-order principle in Callicott's ethical system 1999–2001: '[S]tronger interests (for lack of a better word) generate duties that take precedence over duties generated by weaker interests.' Like SOP-1 discussed earlier, SOP-2 according to Callicott 'can be easily derived from the communitarian foundations of the land ethic'. Now, despite the fact that Callicott has not explained exactly how either of his two SOPs can be 'derived', the missing explanation in the case of SOP-1, as we have just seen, can be quite easily supplied on his behalf by putting together his biosocial communitarianism with his metaethical subjectivism, both of which are on his view foundations of the land ethic. In the case of SOP-2, however, it is not so easy to supply the missing explanation in terms of the 'communitarian foundations of the land ethic'. For unlike SOP-1, SOP-2 does not employ the 'vocabulary of community' at all – a vocabulary proposed by Callicott's moral monism to express different first-order duties generated by his ethical system.⁵⁷ Hence, SOP-2, as it stands, is a quite independent thesis from the communitarianism advocated by Callicott to found the land ethic. Indeed, if SOP-2 can be 'derived' from anything, an obvious candidate is Peter Singer's utilitarian egalitarianism, which proposes equal moral consideration for equal interests,⁵⁸ a position which Callicott constantly attacks and distances from his own communitarianism.⁵⁹

Next, consider the plurality of factors in terms of which the two SOPs prioritize different and possibly conflicting first-order duties generated by Callicott's ethical system. As we have seen, SOP-1 determines the priority of a given community-duty in terms of: (a) the temporal length of one's recognition of one's membership in the community to which the duty correlates, and (b) the degree of one's intimacy with the community to which the duty correlates. SOP-2, on the other hand, determines the priority of a

350 Y. S. Lo

given duty in terms of: (c) the strength of the interest to be protected or promoted by the duty. But recall the promise of Callicott's moral monism to compare and weigh the priorities of conflicting duties in 'commensurable terms' and on 'a single scale, calibrated in a single metric'. So the obvious question to ask now is whether (a), (b), and (c) are 'commensurable terms', measurable by 'a single scale, calibrated in a single metric'.

Let us start with (a) and (b). As I have explained earlier (section 1), the applicability of SOP-1 is guarded by the likelihood that the variations of (a) and (b) across different communities will be proportional. Contingent proportionality, however, is not the same thing as commensurability, which is the subject of our present investigation. Two qualities are commensurable if and only if they are measurable in some common unit(s). The British pound and the German mark, for instance, are commensurable because they can be measured in some established common monetary units, such as the US dollar, according to their exchange rates. But there is no established common unit, nor has Callicott proposed one, in which *both* (a) the temporal length of one's recognition of one's membership in a community, and (b) the degree of one's intimacy with a community, can be measured. Applicable though it may be, SOP-1 as it stands does not weigh the priorities of conflicting duties in 'commensurable terms'. Furthermore, given that there is no essential or conceptual connection between (a) and (b), it is very implausible that a common unit, or in Callicott's words 'a single metric', could ever be devised for measuring both. Consequently, it is very implausible that Callicott's SOP-1 could ever deliver the promise of his moral monism. Worse still, SOP-2, unlike SOP-1, does not use the 'vocabulary of community'. And (c) in terms of which it prioritizes conflicting duties is entirely conceptually unconnected with (a) and (b). Hence, it is even less plausible than very implausible that SOP-2 coupled with SOP-1 could deliver the promise of Callicott's communitarian moral monism.

In short, whether or not the two SOPs themselves are sound, the fact that Callicott's own ethical system has to gain practicability by employing them at the expense of his moral monism shows that his insistence on moral monism at the outset is unsustainable.

3. TOP and Callicott's Communitarian Critique of Egalitarianism

Let us turn to TOP, the one and only third-order principle in Callicott's ethical system 1999–2001: 'When the indication determined by the application of SOP-1 is contradicted by the application of SOP-2, [...] SOP-2 countermands SOP-1.' Because TOP is the highest order principle in Callicott's ethical system, its verdict is therefore final and absolute. Hence, when TOP as the final judge says that 'SOP-2 countermands SOP-1' when the results of their applications disagree, it in effect means that SOP-2 *always* countermands

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 351

SOP-1 when the results of their applications disagree. Accordingly, the claim of TOP is: It is always the case that a duty generated by a *greater* (c) strength of interest ('for lack of a better word') associated with a community where (a) the temporal length of one's recognition of one's membership in it and (b) the degree of one's intimacy with it are *both smaller* has a higher priority than a duty generated by a *smaller* (c) associated with a community where both (a) and (b) are *both greater*. But where does TOP come from and what is the reason for accepting its claim? Callicott does not say. As we have seen, (c) in terms of which SOP-2 prioritizes first-order duties is not (or, at least, is not shown to be) commensurable with (a) and (b) in terms of which SOP-1 prioritizes those duties. Consequently, when the two SOPs are in disagreement with each other, the two by themselves are unable to settle the priorities of conflicting first-order duties. As a solution to this mid-level management problem, Callicott's ethical system employs TOP as the highest-order principle to adjudicate the disagreements between the two SOP-2. But precisely because (c) is not commensurable with (a) and (b), the unexplained and *ad hoc* employment of TOP to give the final verdict 'SOP-2 countermands SOP-1' is problematic. It is not at all implausible, for instance, that a smaller (c) associated with a community where both (a) and (b) are greater can generate a duty (D1) that takes precedence over a duty (D2) generated by a greater (c) associated with a community where both (a) and (b) are smaller. Perhaps, the (c) generating D1 is just slightly smaller than that generating D2, but both (a) and (b) for the community associated with D1 are much greater than that for the community associated with D2. It is not obvious that D2 should, as TOP dictates, take precedence over D1, no matter what they turn out to be. In short, there is no *prima facie* case for accepting Callicott's employment of TOP.

Next, the unexplained employment of TOP, which is in itself problematic, also causes problems for Callicott's commitment to his biosocial communitarianism. Consider, for instance, his biosocial-communitarian attack on Singer's egalitarianism. He writes:

Peter Singer [(1982) ...] argues that he has failed in his duty because he does not donate the greatest portion of his modest income to help alleviate suffering of hungry people living halfway around the world, even though doing so would sorely impoverish not only himself but his own children. Suffering is suffering, no matter whose it may be, and it is the duty of a moral agent to be impartial in weighing the suffering of one against the suffering of another. Since the starving suffer more from his withholding money from them than his children would suffer were he to impoverish them short of starvation, Singer concludes that therefore he should give the greater portion of his income to the starving. From [the] biosocial point of view, [however,] we are members of nested communities each of which has a different structure and therefore different moral requirements. At the center is the immediate family. [...] In general,

352 Y. S. Lo

obligations to family come before obligations to more remotely related fellow humans. For example, *pace* Singer, one should not impoverish one's own children just short of starvation in order to aid actually starving people on another continent.⁶⁰

If he actually did what his theory leads him to think he ought to do, Singer would be badly judged – not only by his nearest and dearest, but by practically everyone else as well.⁶¹

[W]hile duties to one's own children, all things being equal, properly take precedence over duties toward unrelated children in one's municipality, one would be ethically remiss to shower one's own children with luxuries while unrelated children in one's municipality lacked the bare necessities (food, shelter, clothing, education) for a decent life.⁶²

Let us put Callicott's view on family duties under the context of his three higher-order principles. The immediate family, according to him, is at the 'center' of our nested communities (where both (a) and (b) are greater towards the center and smaller towards the margin of this whole nest of communities). So suppose the choice is: feeding one's own children versus feeding unrelated children, then SOP-1 assigns higher priority to the duty to feed one's own children over the duty to feed unrelated children. Furthermore, one should be dictated by SOP-1 alone in the present case. For one's own children and unrelated children have *equally* strong interests in not starving (i.e. (c) is equal for both) and therefore the application of SOP-2 will make no difference. As SOP-2 is indifferent and does not disagree with SOP-1, TOP does not need to be called in. Hence, in virtue of SOP-1, Callicott presents a case against Singer.

Next, suppose the choice is: providing one's children with 'luxuries' versus feeding unrelated children. Then, SOP-1 again assigns higher priority to the duty towards one's own children. But SOP-2 reverses the priority because the interest in not starving is stronger than the interest in enjoying luxuries. As the two SOPs disagree, TOP is called in to give its final verdict, namely 'SOP-2 countermands SOP-1', which means that in this case the duty to feed unrelated children takes higher priority. Hence, in virtue of TOP, Callicott presents a case for not showering one's children with 'luxuries' (e.g. 'a trip to Disneyland', many 'expensive presents at Christmas')⁶³ so as to aid unrelated children with 'bare necessities (food, shelter, clothing, education)'.

Now, if moral choices were always like that: providing one's family members with 'luxuries' versus helping strangers with 'bare necessities', then TOP might work quite well. But that is not so. Suppose the choice is: providing one's own children with education versus feeding unrelated children who will otherwise starve to death. Then, SOP-1, as usual, will assign higher priority to the duty towards one's own children, in this case, the

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 353

duty to provide them with education. But SOP-2 will reverse the priority because the interest in not starving to death is stronger than the interest in being educated. Education, a 'bare' necessity though it may be, is not as bare as enough food for mere survival. As the two SOPs disagree, TOP will be called in. And TOP's final verdict will be, as usual, 'SOP-2 countermands SOP-1', which means that in this case one should deprive one's own children of education in order to save unrelated starving children living halfway around the world. Now, if Singer, as Callicott thinks, 'would be badly judged – not only by his nearest and dearest, but by practically everyone else as well' – had he done what his theory implies, then I do not see why Callicott himself would not be 'badly' (perhaps not as 'badly') judged had he done what his theory implies. But Callicott does not believe that one ought to deprive one's own children of education in order to save starving strangers. As he himself puts it:

[M]ost of us [presumably including himself] feel that our family duties ([...] to educate minor children) take precedence over our civic duties (to contribute to United Way charities [...]), when, because of limited means, we are unable to perform both family and civic duties.⁶⁴

In short, whether Callicott's first-order ethical view on family duties is correct or not, whether the TOP of his three-order ethical system is sound or not; they do not square well with each other. This tension within Callicott's position, however, is only a manifestation of a bigger problem concerning the development of the power structure of his ethical system.

First of all, SOP-1 is the only higher-order principle in the system that clearly expresses the communitarian idea that the closer to the moral heartwood a community is, the more morally urgent its correlated community-duties. It is by appealing to SOP-1 that Callicott has constantly criticized and distanced his communitarianism from Singer's egalitarianism. But, as we have seen (section 2), SOP-2 has an egalitarian overtone. So Callicott's employment of SOP-2 in addition to SOP-1 and then TOP as the final arbitrator who favours SOP-2 has in effect greatly suppressed SOP-1, the only communitarian voice in his system. Putting this more precisely. Given TOP's highest command, SOP-1 is countermanded by SOP-2 whenever the two disagree. When the two agree and suggest the same course of action, however, we can simply follow SOP-2 and do without SOP-1. Hence, whether the two agree or disagree, the function of SOP-1 is redundant. The only occasion where SOP-1 can independently have its communitarian voice heard, then, is when SOP-2 is entirely indifferent and has nothing to say one way or another, i.e. when the conflicting interests at stake are all equal in strength. But occasions like that are relatively rare. Hence, the ruling of SOP-1, which has once been 'in general' enforceable – recall SOP-1's former self,

354 *Y. S. Lo*

the 'general rule' provided by Callicott in 1987 (see section III.2), is now rarely enforceable. Accordingly, Callicott's new employment of SOP-2 and TOP has made his ethical system 1999–2001 as a whole much less communitarian, and more egalitarian like Singer's position, than its former self 1986–94. Indeed, given the egalitarian SOP-2's complete dominance over the communitarian SOP-1 whenever the conflicting interests at stake are unequal, it is not surprising that Callicott's current ethical system, like Singer's egalitarianism, implies that one has a stronger duty to protect and/or promote a stronger interest even if it is an interest belonging to a less closely related party.

Last but not least, Callicott's 1999 downgrading of the communitarian power in his ethical system is a theoretical consequence of his 1986 marginalization of the land ethic (section III.1). For if the communitarian SOP-1 were to operate unrestrictedly as the highest authority in the system (as it appears to have before 1999), then the environmental-oriented duties prescribed by the marginalized land ethic would be the least urgent among the duties prescribed by the many ethical accretions in the system, most of which are human-oriented. But Callicott's ethical system is put forward as a theoretical framework to adequately address the urgent problem of the anthropogenic environmental crisis, which means not only that it should recognize some duties on the part of human beings to protect the environment, but also that it should allow some environmental-oriented duties sometime to take precedence over some human-oriented duties. Obviously, the only way to achieve this is to diminish the communitarian power in Callicott's ethical system.

V. Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed the evolution of the land ethic re-presented by Callicott, as well as the development of his own ethical system, over the last two decades. I have also examined his current three-level ethical system in relation to his particular versions of moral monism and communitarianism.

First, notwithstanding the pressure from the charge of misanthropy and ecofascism, Callicott might not have abandoned the land ethic altogether. But from 1986 onwards he has clearly marginalized it in his many-angular affair with the non-land-ethical parties on the ground-level of his ethical system. His marginalization of the land ethic confirms that it has a misanthropic and ecofascist disposition which would be realized were it to operate alone.

Secondly, and rather similarly, Callicott might not have abandoned his communitarianism altogether. But from 1999 onwards he has clearly demoted it, since the new highest-level management for his ethical system favors the new egalitarian party over the old communitarian party on the mid-level.

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 355

Callicott's downgrading of his communitarianism is, as we have seen, a consequence of his earlier marginalization of the land ethic. And it also points to the fact that his communitarianism is by itself insufficient to fund an adequate environmental ethic.

Finally, it is unclear whether Callicott has abandoned his moral monism, which advocates the 'vocabulary of community' as a 'common vocabulary' for expressing conflicting moral duties, and 'a single scale, calibrated in a single metric' for measuring their priorities. But it is very clear that his moral monism is incompatible with his ethical system 1999–2001 – the higher-level managing parties of which do not all share that vocabulary but instead prioritize conflicting moral duties in terms of a plurality of incommensurable factors. 'Nothing more effectively undermines an ethical system', says Callicott, 'than to show that it is self-contradictory'.⁶⁵ So I suggest that he should either openly discard his moral monism or else further revise his ethical system to deliver the promise of his moral monism.

NOTES

- 1 Thanks to Andrew Brennan, Freya Mathews, and Clare Palmer for their comments on an earlier version of this article.
- 2 Leopold (1949).
- 3 Lo (2001).
- 4 Callicott (1980), p. 21 (first emphasis original, the rest added).
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38 (emphasis added).
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 28 (emphases added).
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29 (emphases added).
- 10 Callicott (1986a, p. 135) is 'inclined to think that for some ardent species preservationists, species have intrinsic value while *specimens have only instrumental value* – as means to the preservation of species' (emphasis added). Suppose what Callicott (1986a) is inclined to think about those ardent species preservationists is true. Then, the complete disallowance of the holistic land ethic (1980) for the non-instrumental value of the individual is one explanation for its popularity among those species preservationists. See Callicott (1999b), pp. 59, 68–69.
- 11 In the literature of environmental philosophy, the notion moral considerability is quite often used interchangeably with the notion of moral value. But the two notions are *not* exactly the same. Moral value is something that ought to be protected and/or promoted. But to say that some thing has moral considerability is to say that its existence, well-being, interest, preference, and/or some other aspect of it ought to be directly (rather than derivatively) given positive weight in our moral deliberation about actions that are likely to affect it. Hence, while things of moral value are morally considerable, it is not necessarily the other way round. For instance, sentient beings are, according to the utilitarian, morally considerable because they have an interest in gaining pleasure and avoiding pain, an interest which can be enhanced or damaged. But, for the utilitarian, moral value resides in the experiences of pleasure and satisfaction as such rather than in the sentient beings themselves. In short, the notion of moral considerability has a wider scope of application than the notion of moral value.
- 12 Callicott (1980), p. 27.
- 13 *Ibid.* (emphasis original).

356 Y. S. Lo

- 14 Regan (1983), pp. 361–2 (first emphasis added). The phrase cited by Regan is from Leopold (1949), p. 209 (Regan's emphasis).
- 15 Also see Aiken (1984), Kheel (1985), Ferré (1996), and Shrader-Frechette (1996).
- 16 Callicott (1989), p. 7. Callicott (1999c, p. 504) says that his (1987a) 'is among his best'.
- 17 Callicott (1987a), p. 84 (emphases added).
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94 (emphases added).
- 20 See n. 17 above.
- 21 Callicott (1986b), p. 410 (emphases added).
- 22 Callicott (1988), p. 58 (emphasis added).
- 23 Callicott (1994b), p. 29 (emphases original).
- 24 See Callicott (1986b), pp. 413–15; (1988), pp. 56–57; and (1994a), pp. 176–7.
- 25 Callicott (1990), p. 147 (first two emphases original, the rest added).
- 26 See n. 4 and n. 6 above.
- 27 Callicott (1986b), p. 410.
- 28 Callicott (1990), p. 169.
- 29 I got this idea from the title of Clare Palmer's 1994 unpublished paper 'Callicott's Environmental Ethics: A Triangular Affair (At Least)'.
- 30 Varner (1991), p. 176.
- 31 See n. 19 above.
- 32 See Callicott (1986b), pp. 412, 420; (1988), pp. 58–59; and (1990), p. 167.
- 33 Or better, I suppose it can mean 'at least in most, if not all, cases'. But this interpretation will not affect the following discussion.
- 34 Callicott (1987a), p. 94.
- 35 Earlier on, Callicott (1990) has attacked pluralism such as the one put forward by Christopher D. Stone (1987) as 'the philosophical equivalent of an individual with a multiple personality disorder'. For reactions towards Callicott's 1990 attack on pluralism in environmental ethics, see Varner (1991), Brennan (1992), Weston (1991), and Wenz (1993).
- 36 Callicott (1994a), p. 173 (emphases added).
- 37 For Callicott's earlier statements on his vision of moral monism, see Callicott (1987a), p. 80 and (1990), pp. 168–9. For his discussion of the 'Midgleyan "mixed communities"', see Callicott (1988).
- 38 Callicott (1994a), p. 175 (emphasis added).
- 39 Note that the version of Callicott (1994a) that I refer to here is a *revised* version reprinted in Callicott (1999a). And it is interesting to note that in the *original* version published in the *Journal of Philosophical Research* 19, pp. 51–60, instead of saying 'with which I myself feel a trifle uncomfortable', Callicott says 'that I myself have never attempted' (p. 55).
- 40 Callicott (2001) is a conjunction of his (1999b), pp. 59–62, 64–75 and (1996), pp. 134–8.
- 41 Callicott (1999b), p. 71 and (2001), p. 211.
- 42 Callicott (1999b), pp. 72–73 and (2001), p. 212 (emphases added).
- 43 Callicott (1999b), p. 76 (emphasis added).
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 45 See n. 6 above.
- 46 Cf. *The Chambers Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1997).
- 47 Callicott (1999b), pp. 71–72 and (2001), p. 211.
- 48 See n. 43 above.
- 49 Callicott (1988), pp. 55–58, *passim*.
- 50 Callicott (1986b), p. 406 (emphasis added). Cf. Callicott (1983), p. 236; (1987a), p. 80; and (1988), p. 54.
- 51 Callicott (1983), p. 236 (emphasis added). Cf. Callicott (1987a), p. 81.
- 52 Callicott (1990), pp. 167–8 (emphases added). Cf. Callicott (1986a), pp. 149–50.
- 53 Callicott (1999b), p. 66 and (2001), p. 208 (first emphasis added). Cf. Callicott (1987a), pp. 81–82 and (1987b), p. 97.
- 54 Callicott (1990), p. 167.
- 55 See Callicott (1980), p. 26; (1985), pp. 161–2; (1986a), p. 133; (1992b), p. 224; and (1995), p. 248.

The Land Ethic and Callicott's Ethical System 357

- 56 See Callicott (1980), pp. 26–27; (1984), p. 305; (1985), pp. 159–62; (1986a), pp. 133, 150–1; and (1987a), pp. 85–86.
 57 See n. 36 above.
 58 See Singer (1993), ch. 2. Arguably, from equal moral consideration for equal interests, we can derive stronger moral consideration for stronger interests, from which we can in turn derive stronger moral duty to protect stronger interests, i.e. SOP-2.
 59 See Callicott (1986b), pp. 410–11; (1987a), pp. 93, 282, n. 42; (1988), pp. 55, 58; (1990), p. 168; (1992a), pp. 103–4; (1994a), p. 179; and (1996), pp. 128–9.
 60 Callicott (1988) pp. 55, 58. Cf. Callicott (1996), pp. 128–9.
 61 Callicott (1996), p. 129.
 62 Callicott (1999b), p. 73.
 63 Callicott (1988), p. 58 and (1994a), p. 173.
 64 Callicott (1999b), p. 73.
 65 Callicott (1986b), p. 383.

REFERENCES

- Aiken, W. 1984. 'Ethical Issues in Agriculture', in T. Regan (ed.), *Earthbound: New Introductory Essays in Environmental Ethics*. New York: Random House, pp. 274–88.
 Brennan, A. 1992. 'Moral Pluralism and the Environment', *Environmental Values* 1, 15–33.
 Callicott, J. B. 1980. 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair', reprinted in Callicott 1989, pp. 15–38, 268–75.
 Callicott, J. B. 1983. 'Aldo Leopold on Education, as Educator, and His Land Ethic in the Context of Contemporary Environmental Education', reprinted in Callicott 1989, pp. 223–37, 305–7.
 Callicott, J. B. 1984. 'Non-anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21, 299–309.
 Callicott, J. B. 1985. 'Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics', reprinted in Callicott 1989, pp. 157–74, 296–300.
 Callicott, J. B. 1986a. 'On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species', reprinted in Callicott 1989, pp. 129–55, 288–96.
 Callicott, J. B. 1986b. 'The Search for an Environmental Ethic', in T. Regan (ed.), *Matters of Life and Death: New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. New York: Random House, pp. 381–424.
 Callicott, J. B. 1987a. 'The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic', reprinted in Callicott 1989, pp. 75–99, 279–82.
 Callicott, J. B. 1987b. 'The Scientific Substance of the Land Ethic', in T. Tanner (ed.), *Aldo Leopold: The Man and His Legacy*, Ankeny, IA: Soil Conservation Society of America, pp. 87–104.
 Callicott, J. B. 1988. 'Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again', reprinted in Callicott 1989, pp. 49–59, 276–7.
 Callicott, J. B. 1989. *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
 Callicott, J. B. 1990. 'The Case against Moral Pluralism', reprinted in Callicott 1999a, pp. 143–69.
 Callicott, J. B. 1992a. 'Can a Theory of Moral Sentiment Support a Normative Environmental Ethic?' reprinted in Callicott 1999a, pp. 99–115.
 Callicott, J. B. 1992b. 'Rolston on Intrinsic Value: A Deconstruction', reprinted in Callicott 1999a, pp. 221–37.
 Callicott, J. B. 1994a. 'Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended', reprinted in Callicott 1999a, pp. 171–83.
 Callicott, J. B. 1994b. 'Preface' to Callicott (1980) reprinted in R. Elliot (ed.), *Environmental Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 29–30.
 Callicott, J. B. 1995. 'Intrinsic Value in Nature: A Metaethical Analysis', reprinted in Callicott 1999a, pp. 239–61.

358 Y. S. Lo

- Callicott, J. B. 1996. 'Do Deconstructive Ecology and Sociobiology Undermine Leopold's Land Ethic?', reprinted in Callicott 1999a, pp. 117–39.
- Callicott, J. B. 1999a. *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Callicott, J. B. 1999b. 'Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism', first published in Callicott 1999a, pp. 59–76.
- Callicott, J. B. 1999c. 'Silencing Philosophers: Minter and the Foundations of Anti-foundationalism', *Environmental Values* 8, 499–516.
- Callicott, J. B. 2001. 'The Land Ethic', in Jamieson (ed.), *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 206–17.
- Darwin, C. R. 1871. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. London: J. Murray.
- Elton, C. 1927. *Animal Ecology*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson.
- Ferré, F. 1996. 'Persons in Nature: Toward an Applicable and Unified Environmental Ethics', *Ethics and the Environment* 1, pp. 15–25.
- Kheel, M. 1985. 'The Liberation of Nature: A Circular Affair', *Environmental Ethics* 7, 135–49.
- Leopold, A. 1949. *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lo, Y. S. 2001. 'Non-Humean Holism, Un-Humean Holism', *Environmental Values* 10, 113–23.
- Regan, T. 1983. *The Case for Animal Rights*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Shrader-Frechette, K. S. 1996. 'Individualism, Holism, and Environmental Ethics', *Ethics and the Environment* 1, 55–69.
- Singer, P. 1982. *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Singer, P. 1993. *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, C. D. 1987. *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Varner, G. E. 1991. 'No Holism Without Pluralism', *Environmental Ethics* 13, 175–9.
- Wenz, P. S. 1993. 'Minimal, Moderate, and Extreme Moral Pluralism', *Environmental Ethics* 15, 61–74.
- Weston, A. 1991. 'On Callicott's Case Against Moral Pluralism', *Environmental Ethics* 13, 283–6.
- Weston, A. 1992. 'Before Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics* 14, 321–38.

Received 8 March 2001

Y. S. Lo, Department of Philosophy, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling HWY, Crawley, WA 6009, Australia. E-mail: ynorvas@cyllene.uwa.edu.au

The Inadequacy of Callicott's Ecological Communitarianism

Darren Domsky*

J. Baird Callicott defends a communitarian environmental ethic that grounds moral standing in shared kinship and community. This normative theory is unacceptable because it is out of synch with our considered moral judgments as environmental philosophers. Ecological communitarianism excludes in advance entities that would obviously qualify for moral standing, and scuttles itself in the process.

INTRODUCTION

J. Baird Callicott's environmental ethic is a cornerstone of contemporary environmental philosophy.¹ Inspired by Aldo Leopold's land ethic and grounded in the works of Leopold, Charles Darwin, and David Hume, it has distinctively meta-ethical and normative theoretical components. Metaethically, the theory is subjectivist, sentimentalist, and naturalistic. There are no objective moral facts, only subjective values, and our moral judgements have their basis in naturally selected, altruistic sentiments. The result is a metaethically lean theory with no supernatural, intuitionist, or objectivist baggage.

Normatively, Callicott describes his theory as communitarian. Its defining feature is that it takes two things, shared kinship and shared community, as fundamental criteria for moral standing.² Unlike the communitarian theories of

* 6080 Haley Center, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849; email: domskdk@auburn.edu. Domsky has broad interests in ethics, including ethical theory, moral psychology, metaethics, and applied ethics. He grateful to Robert Myers, Wayne Sumner, Esteve Morera, Ingrid Stefanovic, the editor of this journal, and two anonymous referees, Michael P. Nelson and Anthony Weston, for their extensive and helpful feedback on this paper.

¹ This ethic is expounded in several of J. Baird Callicott's works, including "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984): 299–309; "Elements of an Environmental Ethic: Moral Considerability and the Biotic Community," in *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 63–74; "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic," in *Defense*, pp. 75–100; "Hume's *Is/Ought* Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic," in *Defense*, pp. 117–28; "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species," in *Defense*, pp. 129–56; "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics," in *Defense*, pp. 157–76; "Moral Considerability and Extraterrestrial Life," in *Defense*, pp. 249–66; "Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism," in *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University Press, 1999), pp. 59–76; "Just the Facts, Ma'am," in *Beyond*, pp. 79–98; "Can a Theory of Moral Sentiments Support a Genuinely Normative Environmental Ethic?" in *Beyond*, pp. 99–116; and "Do Deconstructive Ecology and Sociobiology Undermine the Leopold Land Ethic?" in *Beyond*, pp. 117–42.

² I use *moral standing* in a very general and minimalist sense. An entity has moral standing when it either has intrinsic value or is the proper object of at least one moral duty. The term is

Hume or Darwin, Callicott's communitarianism is an *ecological* communitarianism because the concepts of kinship and community are used not just in their traditional, humans-only senses but in expanded, Leopoldian senses as well. Kinship is stretched to include evolutionary kin, and community is broadened to allow even ecosystems to count as genuine moral communities. Doing so allows not just humans but also animals, plants, ecosystems, and even species *qua* species to have moral standing.

My interest here is specifically the normative component of Callicott's theory and the two criteria for moral standing that it employs. On its face, Callicott's ecological communitarianism—from here on, just communitarianism—has obvious appeal. It secures genuine inherent value,³ and not just instrumental value, for natural entities. As a result, it forms what Tom Regan would call an ethic *of* the environment, and not just an ethic for the *use* of the environment.⁴ Not only that, but it is morally holistic, too: it grounds moral standing not just for individual organisms but for ecological wholes such as ecosystems and species *qua* species as well.⁵ For environmental philosophers, features like these sell themselves.

Despite appearances, though, communitarianism is fatally flawed. As normative criteria, kinship and community suffer an unacceptable shortcoming: they exclude in advance entities that obviously qualify for moral standing, namely, terrestrial and extraterrestrial aliens. This unsettling exclusion is extremely significant, and shows us that communitarianism is grossly out of line with our considered moral judgements. Since there is no way to amend communitarianism without replacing it, our only option is to abandon it in favor of a more adequate normative theory.

meant to be neutral between consequentialist and deontological schools of thought. Though Callicott deals only with questions of value, I use this more general term to explore communitarianism's full normative potential.

³ Callicott, in "Quantum Theory," p. 161, defines intrinsic and inherent value as follows: "Let something be said to possess *intrinsic* value, on the one hand, if its value is objective and independent of all valuing consciousness. On the other, let something be said to possess *inherent* value, if (while its value is not independent of all valuing consciousness) it is valued for itself and not only and merely because it serves as a means to satisfy the desires, further the interests, or occasion the preferred experiences of the valuers." Since I am bracketing metaethics here, I ignore the distinction between intrinsic and inherent value.

⁴ Callicott, "Quantum Theory," p. 157. For Regan's discussion of these two kinds of ethic, see Tom Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 34.

⁵ Callicott explains this feature of his theory in his "Nonhuman Species," pp. 146–47 and 151. It should be noted that, on pp. 139–42, Callicott identifies a third strength: the ability to place greater value on our present biosphere than on the future, possibly more diverse biospheres that will replace it. It is unclear, though, why this ability would be a strength, given the fact that it is fairly standard for moral theories to allot greater moral standing to actual, as opposed to merely potential, people and entities. I therefore do no more than mention that Callicott claims three strengths, not two.

CALLICOTT'S ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

Before we assess communitarianism as a normative theory, it is useful to briefly summarize Callicott's overall environmental ethic. Callicott's is by no means the only ethic that can place normative emphasis on kinship and community, but it gives us a useful account of how these concepts could be made central, one which allows us to consider them in an attractive light.⁶

The groundwork of Callicott's overall ethic is laid out by Hume's moral projectivism. Moral value is not founded in reason but instead in feelings or sentiments that we project onto the world. These sentiments, of course, are not all self-oriented.⁷ Some of them are genuinely other-oriented, and many are directed specifically toward our kin, community, and fellow community members. These moral sentiments form the groundwork of morality.

Callicott takes this Humean axiology and, with Darwin, grounds it in evolutionary science.⁸ Hume only posits universal moral sentiments as a brute psychological fact; Darwin explains why they exist. Darwin does two crucial things: he provides, in terms of natural selection, an explanation of how altruistic sentiments could arise in a hostile, competitive world; and he explains how those altruistic sentiments might be pressured to expand beyond their original limits.⁹ First, parental and filial affections are selected for because the prolonged parental care that they provide is clearly conducive to reproductive success. Once established, such sentiments are pressured by natural selection to broaden their scope by applying to more and more distant kin and to members of larger and larger communities, resulting in larger and larger social units. Eventually, our moral sentiments apply universally to all human beings. Darwin's explanation of the origin of ethics fills out and complements Hume's subjectivist axiology nicely, bringing moral subjectivism and biological science together.

According to Callicott, Leopold, the founder of the famous land ethic,¹⁰ takes communitarian subjectivism to its next logical step. Leopold understands kinship and community not just socially but ecologically. He encourages us to see that the sentiments we already have toward our more traditionally conceived community and kin also apply to our ecological community and evolutionary kin. Once we become "ecologically well-informed,"¹¹ we realize

⁶ Since we are here setting aside metaethical questions, we are free to charitably contemplate Callicott's normative criteria from a variety of metaethical positions, including his own subjectivist one.

⁷ Callicott, "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory," p. 304.

⁸ The best account of Darwin's role in Callicott's theory occurs in Callicott, "Nonhuman Species," pp. 147-50.

⁹ Darwin's full account is provided in Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2d ed. (New York: J. A. Hill, 1904) chap. 4.

¹⁰ For his representative work, see Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

¹¹ Callicott, "Quantum Theory," p. 162.

that “nonhuman natural entities are inherently valuable — as putative members of one extended family or society.”¹²

Callicott’s subjectivist communitarianism is well thought out, but what concerns me here is whether or not communitarianism has any serious defect that scuttles its appeal as a normative theory no matter what metaethical theory it is combined with. I believe that it does. Before that defect can be identified, though, we need to be clearer on exactly how communitarianism works.

KINSHIP AND COMMUNITY CLARIFIED

In order to properly understand communitarianism as a normative theory, we require two things: first, precise definitions of kinship and community; and second, a clear explanation of what makes them criteria for moral standing.

Callicott provides both.¹³ Kinship exists between two entities whenever they share a “common ancestry,”¹⁴ or, in other words, whenever they are both “descendants of a common paleontological parent stock.”¹⁵ If an organism has at least

¹² Ibid., pp. 162–63.

¹³ Although the definitions and normative roles presented here are representative of the majority of Callicott’s work, Callicott does vacillate on whether kinship and community should in fact be taken as meaningfully defined, genuinely normative concepts. On p. 112 of “Can a Theory of Moral Sentiments Support a Genuinely Normative Environmental Ethic?” he specifically asserts that they are not. Kinship and community, he says, are “shaped by our cultural environment.” They are specifically *not* “inflexible moral norms determined by our biology.” He explains that we “feel a special regard for our relatives and our fellows, but which beings are *believed* to be included in these classes is determined by cultural representation, not biology.” In fact, he goes so far as to claim that it is a mistake to take the biological sense of either kinship or community as “the effective one, the one that influences how we behave, when of course it is the vernacular, cultural sense that counts when it comes to how we feel about some other being and thus how we relate to him, her, or it.” In this article, at least, Callicott takes kinship and community to be indicative concepts only, concepts that can suggest, but not actually ground, moral standing. The problem with purely indicative concepts is that they are normatively vacuous. They tell us only *that* a thing is morally valued, not *why* or whether it *ought* to be. As cultural concepts, *kin* and *community* mean only “person or entity that we happen to already value.” The only grounds that they offer for moral standing are viciously circular: a thing ought to figure into our moral deliberations just when it already figures into them. Clearly, purely indicative concepts ground nothing. As a result, I focus only on the robust, scientifically defined senses of kinship and community that Callicott employs in the majority of his work. These are the only senses capable of grounding a genuinely normative theory. If this restricted focus misrepresents or oversimplifies Callicott’s actual normative theory, then my focus here is not Callicott’s theory but a communitarian theory suggested by much of his work.

¹⁴ Callicott, “Hume’s *Is/Ought* Dichotomy,” p. 125.

¹⁵ Callicott, “Moral Considerability,” p. 261. On this page, Callicott also describes kinship in terms of sharing “a common evolutionary heritage,” which makes it sound as though perhaps kinship does not require even one common ancestor in order to still exist. Callicott also mentions in that passage that it is only *perhaps* the case that “we and [the rest of life on Earth] ultimately evolved from a single parent cell,” which again suggests that kinship does not require a common ancestor. These passages are odd, though, compared with the rest of Callicott’s writing on the

one ancestor in common with us, no matter how far back in time or evolution that ancestor existed, that organism is our kin. Community¹⁶ is a function of interdependence. Interdependent entities are entities that, on the whole, cannot exist independently of each other.¹⁷ Members of human or animal communities depend on one another to perform specialized social roles that, in tandem, result in greater survival and reproductive success, and members of biotic communities depend on one another to occupy complexly interrelated ecological niches that in some sense harmonize together. Ecological communities are similar to biotic communities except that they also include inanimate lands and waters as members.

The community concept does not require every member of a community to be interdependent with every other. Such a requirement would make it intolerably inapplicable.¹⁸ Callicott himself is unclear on this detail, but the strongest and most charitable interpretation of interdependence is very broad. Interdependence, as it will be taken here, exists in webs. Individual organisms occupy nodes in these webs when they depend on, and are depended on by, at least one other node occupant. So long as an entity occupies a node of a web that we also occupy, that entity is a fellow community member. Similarly, webs that we occupy qualify as our communities.¹⁹ Understood this way, community applies very broadly, even in situations where dependence is one-way, roundabout, or incalculably remote.²⁰

For the communitarian, kinship and community are both sufficient for moral standing. Anything that qualifies as our kin, community, or fellow community member also necessarily qualifies for direct moral consideration. For the kinship criterion, the connection is formulaic:

subject, and moreover I cannot imagine how else literal kinship could be defined except in terms of having at least one ancestor in common. As a result, I take this as Callicott's definition, and only note that perhaps Callicott has a more complex definition in mind.

¹⁶ As Callicott explains in "Elements," p. 64, and "Conceptual Foundations," p. 80, he takes *community* to be interchangeable with "cooperative group" and "society."

¹⁷ See, for instance, Callicott, "Deconstructive Ecology," pp. 130–31.

¹⁸ Wayne Ouderkirk raises this concern in his "Introduction: Callicott and Environmental Philosophy," in *Land, Value, Community: Callicott and Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Wayne Ouderkirk and Jim Hill (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 6. See also Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), p. 39.

¹⁹ This is not to say that communities are static or easy to demarcate. On the contrary, they can be quite dynamic and their boundaries can be difficult to determine. See Callicott, "Deconstructive Ecology," pp. 131–32.

²⁰ Callicott is also partial to describing the community concept in economic terms, with community members occupying distinct economic roles. On p. 72 of "Elements," he explains that, just as humans can be producers and consumers of goods in markets, natural entities, even non-living ones, can be "producers, consumers, [and] decomposers," each performing "a function which contributes to the overall flow of materials, services, and energy within the system." The interdependence definition seems primary, however, so I will take it as such.

(1) we (i.e., all psychologically normal people) are endowed with certain moral sentiments (sympathy, concern, respect, and so on) for our fellows, especially for our kin; (2) modern biology treats *Homo sapiens* (a) as, like all other living species, a product of the process of organic evolution; and hence, (b) people are literally kin (because of common ancestry) to all other contemporary forms of life; (3) therefore, if so enlightened, we should feel and thus behave . . . toward other living things in ways similar to the way we feel and thus behave toward our human kin.²¹

Similarly for the community criterion:

Leopold urges upon us the conclusion, (3) we ought to “preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.” Why ought we? Because (1) we all generally have a positive attitude toward the community or society to which we belong; and (2) science has now discovered that the natural environment is a community or society to which we belong, no less than to the global village.²²

Callicott is very clear: if either criterion applies, moral standing is secured.

What gives kinship and community their normative bite, however, is that they are not just sufficient but *disjunctively necessary*²³ for moral standing. They are not just adequate grounds for moral standing; they are the *only* grounds. If either applies to an entity, then it has moral standing, and if neither does, then it has none.²⁴ It is precisely because kinship and community are essential in this way that Callicott can purport to really capture why a particular entity has the moral standing that it does. Kinship and community are more than just tickets to moral consideration: they are mandatory passes.

The question here raised is whether or not they make *acceptable* mandatory passes. I maintain that they do not. As I show below, kinship and community are unacceptable as normative criteria because they are clearly *not* disjunctively necessary for moral standing. They necessarily exclude an entire category of entity that we clearly would not, and cannot, exclude. As a result, communitarianism is fundamentally flawed.

²¹ Callicott, “Hume’s *Is/Ought* Dichotomy,” p. 125.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²³ To clarify, B and C are disjunctively necessary for A iff if A then (B or C).

²⁴ Callicott makes this point clear in his famous defense of theoretical monism and attack on theoretical pluralism. He believes that, although it is acceptable to have multiple principles within one theoretical framework, it is unacceptable to endorse multiple frameworks. Thus, although he never specifically phrases it this way, it clearly follows that, for communitarians, kinship and community are disjunctively necessary and not just sufficient for moral standing. See J. Baird Callicott, “Introduction: Compass Points in Environmental Philosophy,” in *Beyond*, pp. 9–14; J. Baird Callicott, “The Case against Moral Pluralism,” in *Beyond*, pp. 143–70; and J. Baird Callicott, “Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended,” in *Beyond*, pp. 171–86.

LESSER DIFFICULTIES

Before we examine this fundamental flaw in Callicott's normative criteria, it would be good to clarify, and set aside, two less conclusive avenues of criticism: first, that ecological community and kinship are arbitrarily singled out from a long list of plausible candidates for naturally selected normative criteria; and second, that ecological community and kinship are far too figurative and metaphorical to be given a serious role in a normative theory.

The problem of arbitrariness is immediate and serious. Even if we otherwise accept Callicott's evolutionary account of the origin and nature of our moral sentiments, and agree that our particular criteria for moral standing were selected for because adopting them contributed to our reproductive success, it still does not follow, and in fact seems unlikely, that our particular normative criteria would be kinship and community. Certainly they may have been advantageous, but many other normative criteria may have been as well. Equally plausible criteria might include physical similarity, shared experience, cuteness (especially for babies), helplessness (especially for babies and the elderly), attractiveness, apparent kindness or friendliness, shared tastes or enjoyments, and numerous others. There is no need for the connection between criteria and selective advantage to be obvious or even easily detectable. A Darwinist metaethic tells us that our normative criteria came about because they were advantageous. It tells us nothing about how advantageous they *seem*. Our actual criteria could be just about anything: so long as we were most likely to look for, notice, or recognize a given property in our close genetic relatives, that property makes a feasible candidate for an evolved criterion for moral standing. Callicott's focus on kinship and community is problematic because it is arbitrary.

Not only that, but it is implausible. Understood narrowly as exclusively anthropocentric concepts, kinship and community make plausible candidates for naturally selected normative criteria. However, understood more broadly, in such a way that they might be applied ecologically, kinship and community would likely have been *disadvantageous* as normative criteria. Even if only a little, they likely would have led us to expend resources on extremely remote kin and non-reciprocating community members and not just on close kin and community members, and this would have made them less conducive to our reproductive success than several alternative criteria. This is not to say that broadly defined kinship and community could not have evolved as our normative criteria anyway. Not all traits are maximally or even obviously advantageous, and sometimes traits persist long after they cease to confer the selective advantage they once did. Still, Callicott builds his normative theory on kinship and community *on the grounds* that they were selectively advantageous, and this ground is obviously problematic. Thus, as far as naturally selected normative criteria go, communitarian kinship and community are not just arbitrary but unlikely candidates.

Though serious, these problems will be set aside for two reasons. First, Callicott's evolutionary story cannot be ruled out. Perhaps these two particular criteria *were* selected for. If so, they would certainly not be our first arbitrary, suboptimal, or vestigial characteristics. Second, my focus here is on normative theory only, not metaethical. Regardless of whether it is plausible that broadly understood kinship and community evolved as our normative criteria, Callicott's Darwinian, subjectivist account is but one of many metaethical theories to pair communitarianism with. My only concern here is with whether kinship and community make acceptable normative criteria for an environmental ethic. As I show below, they do not. As a result, no matter how plausible Callicott's overall environmental ethic is, its communitarian component is entirely unacceptable.

That the concepts of ecological community and kinship are far too figurative and metaphorical to be the basis of criteria for moral standing is also a serious concern. The problem is most serious for the community concept. Callicott claims that science has discovered that the natural environment is a community to which we belong, no less than to the global village, but in order to make this claim it seems he must ignore all science before 1927 and after 1935, since that was the only period when scientists could reasonably be said to have considered the concept of biotic community appropriate. Since 1935, as Callicott is well aware, scientists have largely abandoned the concept on the grounds that "ecosystem" is a far less metaphorical concept.²⁵ Callicott's two criteria for moral standing are held together by very metaphorical glue, and this is a damning basis for criticism.

I do not plan, however, to pursue this criticism of Callicott's theory either, not because the charge of using metaphorical concepts is not serious, but because it is unclear just how metaphorical the two concepts are and because it is doubtful that the communitarian requires completely non-metaphorical concepts anyway. In the first place, assessing just how metaphorical the two concepts are is actually quite difficult. For instance, although ecological community is no longer commonly used, ecologists at least at one time found it fitting, and the reasons why the concept was once fitting are still there. It has since been replaced with a less metaphorical concept, but this does not tell us *how* metaphorical the concept of ecological community is. It tells us only that we have a less metaphorical alternative. Similarly, we do not ordinarily include nonhumans as our kin, but this reluctance does not tell us anything about how metaphorical it is to do so. Nonhumans are obviously not typical kin, but the important fact remains that we literally share ancestors in common with them. Assessing the degree to which Callicott's concepts are metaphorical is difficult, and so any criticism hinging on this assessment will be stymied.

²⁵ Callicott is clearly aware of these facts about the history of ecological science. He discusses them in some detail in his "Just the Facts," pp. 94–95. On p. 66 of "Holistic Environmental Ethics," he acknowledges specifically that the communitarian's community concept is precisely that found in Charles Elton, *Animal Ecology* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1927).

Not only is it unclear just how metaphorical the concepts of ecological kinship and community are, but it is also unclear how literal Callicott needs them to be, especially considering that Callicott does not require obligations associated with our "more recently emerged and impersonal communities" to be as strong as those associated with our "more venerable and intimate communities."²⁶ If natural entities only require *some* moral standing, it is not clear that partially metaphorical criteria will not suffice. I believe this might be why Callicott himself worries so little about the metaphorical or analogical element in the concepts of ecological community and kinship. He freely admits not just that "the term 'ecological community' has at best an analogical sense"²⁷ but even that "the community concept in ecology is a metaphor,"²⁸ one which takes human communities to be "paradigms to which biotic communities are assimilated."²⁹ These sorts of frank admissions only make sense if Callicott is confident that kinship and community do not need to have entirely literal, non-figurative meanings in order to serve as criteria for moral standing, and though a theory involved so heavily in metaphor may seem suboptimal, I do not believe it can be entirely disqualified. Rather than pursue this issue, I set it aside and assume that both criteria are literal enough for Callicott's purposes. The real question is whether the theory is acceptable even if its criteria are accepted as sufficiently literal. I believe it is not. I turn now to the reason why.

THE ALIENS ARGUMENT

The fatal flaw in communitarianism is its exclusionism. As criteria for moral standing, kinship and community exclude in advance obvious candidates for moral standing, namely terrestrial and extraterrestrial aliens. As a result, they seriously clash with how we are actually prepared to assign moral standing. Although communitarianism nicely accommodates all currently known natural entities, we may yet discover entities, either here on Earth or elsewhere, that would obviously also qualify for moral standing but that would be completely excluded by communitarian principles. Regardless of whether any such beings or entities actually exist, we clearly would not discriminate against them, and this feature of our morality right here and now in the actual world is starkly incompatible with the communitarian's two criteria. In the end, kinship and community are clearly *not* disjunctively necessary for moral standing, and so communitarianism is deeply flawed.

I demonstrate how Callicott's criteria fail us by simply considering how we would morally react to the discovery of terrestrial or extraterrestrial aliens. Terrestrial aliens are simply distinctly originated organisms living and reproducing in

²⁶ Callicott, "Holistic Environmental Ethics," p. 73.

²⁷ Callicott, "Elements," p. 72.

²⁸ Callicott, "Deconstructive Ecology," p. 130.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

a physically isolated ecosystem here on Earth. They have no ancestor, nor any web of interdependence, in common with us. Extraterrestrial aliens are also distinctly originated organisms living in isolation from our own ecosystem, but with the added property of living, or at least of having originated, somewhere other than Earth. Aliens can be conscious, sentient, or simply just alive. Their only necessary distinctive features are their ecological isolation and lack of shared ancestry.

Aliens of either sort are clearly conceivable and possible. We can imagine, for instance, discovering terrestrial aliens living deep within the Earth's crust, perhaps living off of geothermal energy, and we can even imagine finding extensive fossilized records of their ancestors that support the conclusion that they too have evolved over time through natural selection. We can also imagine discovering extraterrestrial aliens, perhaps right here in our own solar system, along with their own compliment of fossilized ancestral records. The actual likelihood of such a discovery is irrelevant. All that is required is that it be possible, and surely it is.

When we consider how we would morally react to aliens, we realize immediately that our basic moral convictions are entirely at odds with communitarianism. As Callicott himself is well aware, kinship and community would not apply to aliens:

Extraterrestrial life forms, assuming that they were not of Earthly origin and inoculated somehow on some foreign body, or vice versa, would not be our kin — that is, descendants of a common paleontological parent stock — nor would they be participants in Earth's economy of nature or biotic community. Hence they would lie outside of the scope of Leopold's land ethic.³⁰

Since kinship and community would not apply, the communitarian is forced to conclude that aliens would not qualify for moral standing. Clearly, though, aliens *would* so qualify. If someone were to discover a population of alien organisms and then wipe them all out, doing so would clearly be a moral travesty. It would certainly not be the moral non-event that the communitarian is forced to describe it as. Wiping out alien species in this way would be alarmingly reminiscent of past explorers and colonists exterminating natives in the new world, not because they thought it necessary or even profitable but because they saw no reason not to. Our moral intuition on this matter is strong and clear: denying aliens moral standing just because they are neither related to us nor members of a common community is unjustified discrimination. Our conclusion is also clear: kinship and community cannot be criteria for moral standing because they are clearly *not* disjunctively necessary for it. Communitarianism must be rejected.

³⁰ Callicott, "Moral Considerability," p. 261.

SIDE-STEPPING, AND EVEN GAINING STRENGTH FROM, AN APPARENT PROBLEM

Before I address possible objections to this aliens argument, it is important to first identify a potential problem not just as a non-problem but, ironically, as a source of further intuitive support. It may seem that discussion of distinctly originated and ecologically isolated life forms is conceptually or theoretically problematic because we have no agreed upon criteria for separating genuine new life forms from non-life forms. This lack of agreement does not strike me as a very serious concern, but even if it is, it is important to realize that it has no necessary impact on the present argument because it is not necessary to go beyond accepted biological criteria in defining aliens. For our purposes, we are free to imagine whatever biological coincidences or similarities we require in order to be conceptually and theoretically satisfied that the aliens we are considering are as alive as familiar organisms are. Coincidentally familiar aliens are clearly possible, and our moral reaction to them would clearly be non-exclusionary. This is all that we require.

In fact, it is more than we require. Focusing on aliens that are physically just like ordinary non-aliens adds enormous intuitive force to the original argument. If we consider only strange and hard to categorize possible life forms, our conclusions will be less clear even if we are not troubled by theoretical or conceptual difficulties. If a discovered alien, for instance, were made entirely of silicone and had no familiar appendages or organs, it is not nearly as obvious how we would react. Focusing on coincidentally familiar life forms rids us of all ambiguity. If another planet has people, zebras, and pine trees indistinguishable from the ones here on Earth, clearly they are alive and clearly they have moral standing. To insist that they do not, on the grounds that they are unrelated and too distant, is patently absurd. Communitarianism has a very clear, very serious failing: it takes as fundamental properties which, when very carefully isolated from all others, have absolutely no relevance to our actual moral judgements. The possibility of biological coincidences only highlights this failing.

ANTICIPATING OBJECTIONS

This initial worry aside, there remain two conceivable ways to defend communitarianism against the charge that its two normative criteria for moral standing are not disjunctively necessary. The first involves asserting that the argument rests on a false or at least undefended assumption, namely, that we would in fact grant moral standing to aliens if we were to discover any. The second involves asserting that the argument is morally irrelevant. Because, as far as we know, there *are* no aliens, considerations of them have no bearing on which normative criteria are acceptable. Neither succeeds. To see why, let us examine them in order.

THE RESPONSE THAT ALIENS WOULD NOT MATTER MORALLY

The first strategy is most direct. The claim that the aliens argument rests on the false, or at least unshared, assumption that we would in fact attribute moral standing to alien life forms has the potential to derail, or at least greatly deflate, the entire criticism. If the assumption that there is something intuitively wrong with wiping out newly discovered alien organisms is contentious, then it is also contentious that there is something wrong with a normative theory that fails to prohibit doing so.

I do not intend to offer any developed defense of this assumption here, and for two reasons. First and foremost, I believe it to be intuitively obvious that we *ought* to recognize, indeed that we *would* recognize,³¹ aliens as having moral standing, and I believe that this intuition is especially strong in the specific case of aliens which are biologically indistinguishable from familiar people, animals, and plants here on Earth. In fact, unless these are both widely shared intuitions, I can make no sense at all of our broad and sweeping efforts in modern-day society to locate and communicate with alien life, especially such efforts as our remote-control search for life on Mars or our vastly popular SETI at home project, in which millions³² of people voluntarily donate their computer processing power to the electromagnetic search for extraterrestrial intelligence. To say that these efforts are aimed purely at the discovery of *resources* rather than of beings with obvious moral standing seems frankly at odds with the interest in and scope of these efforts.

Second, giving up this assumption about aliens makes it impossible to internally criticize a particularly terrible category of acts, namely, acts of ignorant genocide. Especially in history but even in many societies today, certain human communities see non-adjointing communities as literally alien, at least in our terrestrial sense of alien. The Spanish conquistadors, for instance, saw native

³¹ It is important to note the distinction in these two claims. Not everyone who accepts the first accepts the second. As I show below, Callicott himself accepts the first but is doubtful of the second. On p. 256 of "Moral Considerability," he says that, looking at our track record, things do "not bode well for any extraterrestrial life unfortunate enough to be discovered by us." On the other hand, some will accept the second even more readily than the first. On p. 130 of his *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), Eugene Hargrove explains that he believes it is "likely, even predictable" that alien "organisms would be considered more valuable [than Earth organisms] because they were not part of our system or our history." I believe that both claims are true. Though greed, pettiness, and paranoia can all interfere with our sensibility in the short term, surely our long-run moral reaction to a discovery of aliens will be to disregard location of origin entirely. I have no less faith in our ability to morally disregard planetary origin than I do in our ability to morally disregard continental origin here on Earth.

³² As of early in 2003, over four and a half million people have volunteered in the SETI at Home project, and have contributed nearly one and a half million years worth of computer processing time to the search for alien communications. For more information, see <http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu>.

Americans as neither kin nor fellow community members, and proceeded to wipe them out. Similarly, various contemporary peoples feel the same way about neighboring peoples, and proceed to exterminate them. In such cases, it seems safe to presume that obvious similarities in biology and mentality are noted but considered irrelevant. If we reject the assumption that there is something wrong with wiping out aliens, then we also give up our ability to internally criticize those who wipe out human beings that they *perceive* as aliens. Certainly we can still criticize the erroneous perceptions themselves, but we lose our ability to criticize the mass-murderers *relative to what they believe about their victims*. This is an extraordinary thing to give up. If anything is internally morally condemnable, surely acts of genocide are, ignorant or not. Whether or not aggressors see their victims as kin or community members, they clearly realize that their victims are intelligent, sentient, and not wanting to be killed, and surely these sorts of thing are in themselves enough to make genocide morally deplorable. If we give up the assumption that aliens obviously qualify for direct moral consideration, we also give up our ability to internally criticize acts of ignorant genocide, and this speaks volumes against doing so.

The assumption that aliens obviously qualify for moral standing is thus very difficult to contest. In fact, Callicott accepts it himself. Even though aliens would be neither kin nor fellow community members, Callicott believes we would, and *should*, still recognize them as having moral standing. He talks specifically about our "hopefully shared moral intuition that extraterrestrial life should be treated with respect, or reverence, if and when we may encounter it,"³³ and says specifically that it would be morally wrong to wipe out newly discovered alien life forms.³⁴ Even Callicott, then, would not find this response appealing. Let us move on, then, to a response that he does consider.

THE RESPONSE THAT ALIENS ARE UNINTERESTING

The second strategy involves accepting that aliens would have moral standing but asserting that any claim about undiscovered, merely possible life forms is theoretically uninteresting and irrelevant in moral philosophy. One might argue that, because as far as we know there are no aliens, it simply does not matter whether or not a normative theory can accommodate them. Environmental philosophers, one might insist, are only concerned with life as we know it here on Earth, and so claims about possible alternative life forms have no bearing on the theoretical acceptability of a normative theory.

This theoretical claim is easily accompanied by the more pragmatic claim that it is also wasteful and inappropriate to spend time and energy thinking about life forms that do not exist because these sorts of thoughts inexcusably

³³ Callicott, "Moral Considerability," p. 263.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 260–61.

draw our attention away from the serious, real-world crisis that has widely befallen our very real and everywhere endangered life forms here on Earth. As a result, one might insist not only that considerations of non-existent, merely possible life forms are theoretically pointless but that they are unacceptably distracting and wasteful of our time.

It is interesting that while Callicott ultimately is not persuaded by the pragmatic version, he nonetheless finds the theoretical one compelling. Callicott tries to question whether we should waste time thinking about the moral status of merely potential life forms, but ultimately he rejects that it is a waste of time, on the grounds that theorizing about alien life can have a beneficial impact on our real-world behavior and on our human consciousness.³⁵ Still, though these thoughts are not a waste of time, they do not affect our moral theories. Callicott is very clear about this point:

... from the point of view of . . . the solar system, the galaxy, and the universe at large, the land ethic seems almost parochial in extent and even tribal in nature because it restricts itself to local—that is, terrestrial—beings, and rests their moral value on kinship and mutual dependency. The very failure of the land ethic to provide moral considerability for extraterrestrial life reveals at once its strength for Earth-oriented environmental ethics—which is of course the only variety of environmental ethics with any genuine practical interest or application.³⁶

Even though the land ethic fails miserably at accommodating extraterrestrial life, this failure is no theoretical handicap because, unless aliens actually turn out to exist, there is no need to accommodate them in our normative theories.

Neither version of this objection succeeds. The prudential version is plainly misguided. The fact that something is not the case simply has no bearing on whether or not thinking about it is a waste of time for the moral philosopher. If that were the case, then considerations about genetic engineering in humans or about retaliating after a full-scale nuclear strike would also be wastes of time, and clearly they are not. It is neither wasteful nor inappropriate to think about and discuss such topics in advance, and for two reasons. First, and most obviously, the events may very well occur, and they are very serious if they do. Obviously, it is prudent to be at least somewhat prepared for how to deal with them morally. Second, and more importantly, these sorts of considerations force us to examine and learn more about our full range of moral intuitions, beliefs, and judgments right now. By clarifying our fundamental moral convictions, we ultimately affect, and sometimes entirely change, policy objectives. What could be of more practical import?

The theoretical version is misguided because it is inaccurate. It claims that, in a world without aliens, considerations of aliens tell us nothing important.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 256–61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262 (emphasis added).

This claim is exactly false. Even in a world without aliens, i.e., even in the world right now as best we know it, considerations of aliens tell us something extremely important. They tell us about our current moral dispositions and actual moral beliefs and attitudes. They help us realize that normative criteria that exclude aliens are unacceptable because, on careful consideration, aliens would obviously qualify for moral standing. Callicott's normative criteria are unacceptable not because they poorly match the moral reaction we *would* have to aliens were we to discover them, but because they are poorly matched to our *current* beliefs and attitudes. Even though no aliens have ever been discovered, considerations of aliens help us realize that kinship and community are only correlated with some other, genuinely morally relevant property (or properties). While merely correlated criteria are interesting, they are unacceptable substitutes for the genuine article. Considerations of aliens are thus extremely important theoretically, even in a world without aliens: they allow us to realize that a normative ethic based on kinship and community is on the wrong track.

In fact, the theoretical version of this objection *cannot* be valid. If it were, it would necessarily lead to one of two absurd mysteries. The problem lies in the following detail: the objection grants that aliens would matter morally if they were discovered,³⁷ but makes it impossible to explain exactly *why* they would matter. Grounds for their moral standing would have to either appear spontaneously with their discovery or else exist before that discovery. If the grounds must spontaneously appear only after aliens are discovered, then it is mysterious indeed how we can already know so much about them or even that they will spontaneously appear in the first place. If the grounding moral principles already exist, then it is a mystery how we can ignore them entirely and remain communitarians.

That entirely hypothetical considerations are theoretically relevant and useful should be old hat to environmental philosophers. In the earliest days of the discipline, Richard Routley famously had us consider whether it would be morally acceptable, as the last human being, to arbitrarily wipe out life forms, on the grounds that soon no one would be able to appreciate or value them anyway.³⁸ Even though it is absurdly unlikely that any of us will ever actually find ourselves in this position—even if something manages to wipe out the entire human species in our lifetime, the odds are obviously many billion to one against being the last one standing—the “last man” thought experiment is immeasurably useful. It helps us realize, sometimes to our own amazement, that we do not actually believe that natural entities have instrumental value only.

³⁷ Remember, unless this point is accepted, there is no need for this second response in the first place. We only need to talk about whether considerations of merely possible aliens can affect our current normative theories if we have already rejected the claim that aliens would not matter morally even once we discovered them.

³⁸ Richard Routley, “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?” in Bulgarian Organizing Committee, *Proceedings of the Fifteenth World Congress of Philosophy* (Sophia, Bulgaria: Sophia Press, 1973), pp. 205–10.

Whether or not any of us actually turns out to be the last of our kind is entirely irrelevant. What matters is our actual moral convictions right now, and hypothetical considerations can obviously shed priceless light on these sometimes obscure creatures.

In fact, hypothetical considerations are really no different than considerations of actual, atypical examples. Both challenge our basic moral assumptions, and both allow us to identify normative criteria that we do not really endorse. We see a wonderful example of how significant the consideration of an atypical example can be in vegetarians who live by the credo of never eating anything with a face. When such vegetarians discover that octopi, though faceless, are very intelligent and capable of suffering, they quickly replace their inadequate credo, not because their moral convictions have changed but because their convictions have been made more clear and less tacit. Hypothetical considerations give us just this same clarity, and the result is the same: unacceptable normative criteria are identified as such and abandoned. The difference is that hypothetical considerations allow us to revise our principles *before* they can cause moral tragedies.

Thus, I reject the irrelevance objection completely. When Callicott's two normative criteria exclude alien organisms from having moral standing, they fall out of line with our actual moral outlook here and now, regardless of whether we ever encounter alien organisms.

HOW SHOULD WE REACT?

Given that kinship and community are not disjunctively necessary for moral standing and therefore unacceptable as normative criteria, how should we react? Is it possible to rescue communitarianism by supplementing it with additional, non-communitarian criteria for moral standing,³⁹ or must we abandon the theory entirely?

The reality is that we must abandon it, and for two reasons. First, there is no way, in practice, to patch communitarianism. Any plausible attempt to supple-

³⁹ This is exactly the path that Callicott indicates he will take if aliens are discovered. On pp. 264–65 of "Moral Considerability," Callicott tells us that his add-on theory of choice is the weak anthropocentrism found in Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984): 131–48. According to weak anthropocentrism, nonhuman entities have moral standing in virtue of their capacity to transform or ennoble human beings. Even though communitarianism would exclude them, aliens would still have moral standing because their "discovery, study, and conservation" would be "so positively transforming of human consciousness." By combining these two theories, Callicott believes he can "provide at once for the moral considerability of extraterrestrial as well as of terrestrial life." Clearly, though, he cannot. Weak anthropocentrism only allows alien life forms to have instrumental value, not intrinsic. It is because they do something for us, and only because they do, that they count morally. As environmental philosophers, our clear conviction is that organisms have moral standing regardless of where they come from *and* regardless of what resources or opportunities they offer

ment kinship and community will inevitably lead to their supplantation instead. The problem is that any criterion that will work as a supplement will work too well. For instance, if we add on conation⁴⁰ as a third disjunct, and allot moral standing not just to kin and community but to entities that exhibit interests, wills, or goods of their own, this will indeed accommodate aliens, but there will be no way to stop conation from entirely replacing kinship and community as normative criteria. Because conation applies to everything that kinship and community do and more besides, the latter would be rendered practically superfluous. Compared to conation, kinship and community would be less reliable and always redundant, and so they would cease to play any useful or distinctive normative role. It would always be simpler,⁴¹ and more to the point, to focus on conation alone. Thus, supplementing communitarianism is effectively impossible. Once supplemented, the original criteria will simply atrophy.

Second, to attempt to patch communitarianism is to miss the significance of the aliens argument. Kinship and community are not just incomplete; they are morally irrelevant. They are mere correlates, nothing more. Supplementing them is effectively impossible, but more importantly it is morally inappropriate. Recall the criterion of having a face. Once vegetarians realize that this criterion is unacceptably exclusive, they drop it entirely, not because it is practically impossible to supplement it instead (though surely it is practically impossible), but because the vegetarians in question realize that having a face

us. As a result, I disregard this combination in favor of a more plausible one. What is especially odd, though, is that Callicott even contemplates this combination in the first place. For one thing, the combination is morally pluralistic: it involves more than one theoretical framework. That Callicott even considers embracing a pluralistic position is quite ironic, given his rigorous stand against exactly this sort of pluralism in his "The Case against Moral Pluralism" and "Moral Monism." For another, Callicott is ordinarily quite opposed to any form of anthropocentrism. It is quite odd that he would consider supplementing his own theory with a theory he otherwise finds so completely inadequate. See, for instance, J. Baird Callicott, "Intrinsic Value in Nature: A Metaethical Analysis," in *Beyond*, pp. 242–46; J. Baird Callicott, "Environmental Philosophy Is Environmental Activism: The Most Radical and Effective Kind," in *Beyond*, pp. 30–3; and J. Baird Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 158.

⁴⁰ For a sampling of conativist works, see Kenneth Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable," *Journal of Philosophy* 22 (1978): 308–25; Albert Schweitzer, "The Ethic of Reverence for Life," in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1976), pp. 133–38; Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Although the term *conativist* is but one of many used to describe this family of theories, it is the one Callicott uses in relevant discussions. For simplicity and clarity, I use it along with him.

⁴¹ Although philosophers who find moral pluralism distasteful will have an additional reason to prefer non-combined normative theories, I make no principled objection to moral pluralism.

was never morally relevant in the first place. Similarly, we do not enlighten racists by supplementing their racial criteria for moral standing with race-independent criteria. We enlighten them by teaching them that race is morally immaterial. Supplementing communitarianism instead of replacing it is not just practically impossible but morally inappropriate, and so our only choice as environmental philosophers is to drop communitarianism entirely.

[12]

Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique

Ramachandra Guha*

I present a Third World critique of the trend in American environmentalism known as deep ecology, analyzing each of deep ecology's central tenets: the distinction between anthropocentrism and biocentrism, the focus on wilderness preservation, the invocation of Eastern traditions, and the belief that it represents the most radical trend within environmentalism. I argue that the anthropocentrism/biocentrism distinction is of little use in understanding the dynamics of environmental degradation, that the implementation of the wilderness agenda is causing serious deprivation in the Third World, that the deep ecologist's interpretation of Eastern traditions is highly selective, and that in other cultural contexts (e.g., West Germany and India) radical environmentalism manifests itself quite differently, with a far greater emphasis on equity and the integration of ecological concerns with livelihood and work. I conclude that despite its claims to universality, deep ecology is firmly rooted in American environmental and cultural history and is inappropriate when applied to the Third World.

Even God dare not appear to the poor man except in the form of bread.

—Mahatma Gandhi

I. INTRODUCTION

The respected radical journalist Kirkpatrick Sale recently celebrated “the passion of a new and growing movement that has become disenchanted with the environmental establishment and has in recent years mounted a serious and sweeping attack on it—style, substance, systems, sensibilities and all.”¹ The vision of those whom Sale calls the “New Ecologists”—and what I refer to in this article as deep ecology—is a compelling one. Decrying the narrowly economic goals of mainstream environmentalism, this new movement aims at nothing less

*Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560 012, India. This essay was written while the author was a visiting lecturer at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. He is grateful to Mike Bell, Tom Birch, Bill Burch, Bill Cronon, Diane Mayerfeld, David Rothenberg, Kirkpatrick Sale, Joel Seton, Tim Weiskel, and Don Worster for helpful comments.

¹ Kirkpatrick Sale, “The Forest for the Trees: Can Today's Environmentalists Tell the Difference,” *Mother Jones* 11, no. 8 (November 1986): 26.

than a philosophical and cultural revolution in human attitudes toward nature. In contrast to the conventional lobbying efforts of environmental professionals based in Washington, it proposes a militant defence of "Mother Earth," an unflinching opposition to human attacks on undisturbed wilderness. With their goals ranging from the spiritual to the political, the adherents of deep ecology span a wide spectrum of the American environmental movement. As Sale correctly notes, this emerging strand has in a matter of a few years made its presence felt in a number of fields: from academic philosophy (as in the journal *Environmental Ethics*) to popular environmentalism (for example, the group Earth First!).

In this article I develop a critique of deep ecology from the perspective of a sympathetic outsider. I critique deep ecology not as a general (or even a foot soldier) in the continuing struggle between the ghosts of Gifford Pinchot and John Muir over control of the U.S. environmental movement, but as an outsider to these battles. I speak admittedly as a partisan, but of the environmental movement in India, a country with an ecological diversity comparable to the U.S., but with a radically dissimilar cultural and social history.

My treatment of deep ecology is primarily historical and sociological, rather than philosophical, in nature. Specifically, I examine the cultural rootedness of a philosophy that likes to present itself in universalistic terms. I make two main arguments: first, that deep ecology is uniquely American, and despite superficial similarities in rhetorical style, the social and political goals of radical environmentalism in other cultural contexts (e.g., West Germany and India) are quite different; second, that the social consequences of putting deep ecology into practice on a worldwide basis (what its practitioners are aiming for) are very grave indeed.

II. THE TENETS OF DEEP ECOLOGY

While I am aware that the term *deep ecology* was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, this article refers specifically to the American variant.² Adherents of the deep ecological perspective in this country, while arguing intensely among themselves over its political and philosophical implications, share some fundamental premises about human-nature interactions. As I see it, the defining characteristics of deep ecology are fourfold:

² One of the major criticisms I make in this essay concerns deep ecology's lack of concern with inequalities *within* human society. In the article in which he coined the term *deep ecology*, Naess himself expresses concerns about inequalities between and within nations. However, his concern with social cleavages and their impact on resource utilization patterns and ecological destruction is not very visible in the later writings of deep ecologists. See Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary," *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 96 (I am grateful to Tom Birch for this reference).

First, deep ecology argues, that the environmental movement must shift from an "anthropocentric" to a "biocentric" perspective. In many respects, an acceptance of the primacy of this distinction constitutes the litmus test of deep ecology. A considerable effort is expended by deep ecologists in showing that the dominant motif in Western philosophy has been anthropocentric—i.e., the belief that man and his works are the center of the universe—and conversely, in identifying those lonely thinkers (Leopold, Thoreau, Muir, Aldous Huxley, Santayana, etc.) who, in assigning man a more humble place in the natural order, anticipated deep ecological thinking. In the political realm, meanwhile, establishment environmentalism (shallow ecology) is chided for casting its arguments in human-centered terms. Preserving nature, the deep ecologists say, has an intrinsic worth quite apart from any benefits preservation may convey to future human generations. The anthropocentric-biocentric distinction is accepted as axiomatic by deep ecologists, it structures their discourse, and much of the present discussion remains mired within it.

The second characteristic of deep ecology is its focus on the preservation of unspoiled wilderness—and the restoration of degraded areas to a more pristine condition—to the relative (and sometimes absolute) neglect of other issues on the environmental agenda. I later identify the cultural roots and portentous consequences of this obsession with wilderness. For the moment, let me indicate three distinct sources from which it springs. Historically, it represents a playing out of the preservationist (read *radical*) and utilitarian (read *reformist*) dichotomy that has plagued American environmentalism since the turn of the century. Morally, it is an imperative that follows from the biocentric perspective; other species of plants and animals, and nature itself, have an intrinsic right to exist. And finally, the preservation of wilderness also turns on a scientific argument—viz., the value of biological diversity in stabilizing ecological regimes and in retaining a gene pool for future generations. Truly radical policy proposals have been put forward by deep ecologists on the basis of these arguments. The influential poet Gary Snyder, for example, would like to see a 90 percent reduction in human populations to allow a restoration of pristine environments, while others have argued forcefully that a large portion of the globe must be immediately cordoned off from human beings.³

Third, there is a widespread invocation of Eastern spiritual traditions as forerunners of deep ecology. Deep ecology, it is suggested, was practiced both by major religious traditions and at a more popular level by "primal" peoples in non-Western settings. This complements the search for an authentic lineage in Western thought. At one level, the task is to recover those dissenting voices within the Judeo-Christian tradition; at another, to suggest that religious tradi-

³ Gary Snyder, quoted in Sale, "The Forest for the Trees," p. 32. See also Dave Foreman, "A Modest Proposal for a Wilderness System," *Whole Earth Review*, no. 53 (Winter 1986–87): 42–45.

tions in other cultures are, in contrast, dominantly if not exclusively "biocentric" in their orientation. This coupling of (ancient) Eastern and (modern) ecological wisdom seemingly helps consolidate the claim that deep ecology is a philosophy of universal significance.

Fourth, deep ecologists, whatever their internal differences, share the belief that they are the "leading edge" of the environmental movement. As the polarity of the shallow/deep and anthropocentric/biocentric distinctions makes clear, they see themselves as the spiritual, philosophical, and political vanguard of American and world environmentalism.

III. TOWARD A CRITIQUE

Although I analyze each of these tenets independently, it is important to recognize, as deep ecologists are fond of remarking in reference to nature, the interconnectedness and unity of these individual themes.

(1) Insofar as it has begun to act as a check on man's arrogance and ecological hubris, the transition from an anthropocentric (human-centered) to a biocentric (humans as only one element in the ecosystem) view in both religious and scientific traditions is only to be welcomed.⁴ What is unacceptable are the radical conclusions drawn by deep ecology, in particular, that intervention in nature should be guided primarily by the need to preserve biotic integrity rather than by the needs of humans. The latter for deep ecologists is anthropocentric, the former biocentric. This dichotomy is, however, of very little use in understanding the dynamics of environmental degradation. The two fundamental ecological problems facing the globe are (i) overconsumption by the industrialized world and by urban elites in the Third World and (ii) growing militarization, both in a short-term sense (i.e., ongoing regional wars) and in a long-term sense (i.e., the arms race and the prospect of nuclear annihilation). Neither of these problems has any tangible connection to the anthropocentric-biocentric distinction. Indeed, the agents of these processes would barely comprehend this philosophical dichotomy. The proximate causes of the ecologically wasteful characteristics of industrial society and of militarization are far more mundane: at an aggregate level, the dialectic of economic and political structures, and at a micro-level, the life style choices of individuals. These causes cannot be reduced, whatever the level of analysis, to a deeper anthropocentric attitude toward nature; on the contrary, by constituting a grave threat to human survival, the ecological degradation they cause does not even serve the best interests of human beings! If my identification of the major dangers to the integrity of the natural world is correct, invoking the bogey of anthropocentrism is at best irrelevant and at worst a dangerous obfuscation.

⁴ See, for example, Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1977).

(2) If the above dichotomy is irrelevant, the emphasis on wilderness is positively harmful when applied to the Third World. If in the U.S. the preservationist/utilitarian division is seen as mirroring the conflict between "people" and "interests," in countries such as India the situation is very nearly the reverse. Because India is a long settled and densely populated country in which agrarian populations have a finely balanced relationship with nature, the setting aside of wilderness areas has resulted in a direct transfer of resources from the poor to the rich. Thus, Project Tiger, a network of parks hailed by the international conservation community as an outstanding success, sharply posits the interests of the tiger against those of poor peasants living in and around the reserve. The designation of tiger reserves was made possible only by the physical displacement of existing villages and their inhabitants; their management requires the continuing exclusion of peasants and livestock. The initial impetus for setting up parks for the tiger and other large mammals such as the rhinoceros and elephant came from two social groups, first, a class of ex-hunters turned conservationists belonging mostly to the declining Indian feudal elite and second, representatives of international agencies, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), seeking to transplant the American system of national parks onto Indian soil. In no case have the needs of the local population been taken into account, and as in many parts of Africa, the designated wildlands are managed primarily for the benefit of rich tourists. Until very recently, wildlands preservation has been identified with environmentalism by the state and the conservation elite; in consequence, environmental problems that impinge far more directly on the lives of the poor—e.g., fuel, fodder, water shortages, soil erosion, and air and water pollution—have not been adequately addressed.⁵

Deep ecology provides, perhaps unwittingly, a justification for the continuation of such narrow and inequitable conservation practices under a newly acquired radical guise. Increasingly, the international conservation elite is using the philosophical, moral, and scientific arguments used by deep ecologists in advancing their wilderness crusade. A striking but by no means atypical example is the recent plea by a prominent American biologist for the takeover of large portions of the globe by the author and his scientific colleagues. Writing in a prestigious scientific forum, the *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Daniel Janzen argues that only biologists have the competence to decide how the tropical landscape should be used. As "the representatives of the natural world," biologists are "in charge of the future of tropical ecology," and only they have

⁵ See Centre for Science and Environment, *India: The State of the Environment 1982: A Citizens Report* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1982); R. Sukumar, "Elephant-Man Conflict in Karnataka," in Cecil Saldanha, ed., *The State of Karnataka's Environment* (Bangalore: Centre for Taxonomic Studies, 1985). For Africa, see the brilliant analysis by Helge Kjekshus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

the expertise and mandate to “determine whether the tropical agroscape is to be populated only by humans, their mutualists, commensals, and parasites, or whether it will also contain some islands of the greater nature—the nature that spawned humans, yet has been vanquished by them.” Janzen exhorts his colleagues to advance their territorial claims on the tropical world more forcefully, warning that the very existence of these areas is at stake: “if biologists want a tropics in which to biologize, they are going to have to buy it with care, energy, effort, strategy, tactics, time, and cash.”⁶

This frankly imperialist manifesto highlights the multiple dangers of the preoccupation with wilderness preservation that is characteristic of deep ecology. As I have suggested, it seriously compounds the neglect by the American movement of far more pressing environmental problems within the Third World. But perhaps more importantly, and in a more insidious fashion, it also provides an impetus to the imperialist yearning of Western biologists and their financial sponsors, organizations such as the WWF and IUCN. The wholesale transfer of a movement culturally rooted in American conservation history can only result in the social uprooting of human populations in other parts of the globe.

(3) I come now to the persistent invocation of Eastern philosophies as antecedent in point of time but convergent in their structure with deep ecology. Complex and internally differentiated religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism—are lumped together as holding a view of nature believed to be quintessentially biocentric. Individual philosophers such as the Taoist Lao Tzu are identified as being forerunners of deep ecology. Even an intensely political, pragmatic, and Christian influenced thinker such as Gandhi has been accorded a wholly undeserved place in the deep ecological pantheon. Thus the Zen teacher Robert Aitken Roshi makes the strange claim that Gandhi’s thought was not human-centered and that he practiced an embryonic form of deep ecology which is “traditionally Eastern and is found with differing emphasis in Hinduism, Taoism and in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.”⁷ Moving away from the realm of high philosophy and scriptural religion, deep ecologists make the further claim that at the level of material and spiritual practice “primal” peoples subordinated themselves to the integrity of the biotic universe they inhabited.

I have indicated that this appropriation of Eastern traditions is in part dictated by the need to construct an authentic lineage and in part a desire to present deep ecology as a universalistic philosophy. Indeed, in his substantial and quixotic

⁶ Daniel Janzen, “The Future of Tropical Ecology,” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 17 (1986): 305–06; emphasis added.

⁷ Robert Aitken Roshi, “Gandhi, Dogen, and Deep Ecology,” reprinted as appendix C in Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985). For Gandhi’s own views on social reconstruction, see the excellent three volume collection edited by Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986–87).

biography of John Muir, Michael Cohen goes so far as to suggest that Muir was the "Taoist of the [American] West."⁸ This reading of Eastern traditions is selective and does not bother to differentiate between alternate (and changing) religious and cultural traditions; as it stands, it does considerable violence to the historical record. Throughout most recorded history the characteristic form of human activity in the "East" has been a finely tuned but nonetheless conscious and dynamic manipulation of nature. Although mystics such as Lao Tzu did reflect on the spiritual essence of human relations with nature, it must be recognized that such ascetics and their reflections were supported by a society of cultivators whose relationship with nature was a far more *active* one. Many agricultural communities do have a sophisticated knowledge of the natural environment that may equal (and sometimes surpass) codified "scientific" knowledge; yet, the elaboration of such traditional ecological knowledge (in both material and spiritual contexts) can hardly be said to rest on a mystical affinity with nature of a deep ecological kind. Nor is such knowledge infallible; as the archaeological record powerfully suggests, modern Western man has no monopoly on ecological disasters.

In a brilliant article, the Chicago historian Ronald Inden points out that this romantic and essentially positive view of the East is a mirror image of the scientific and essentially pejorative view normally upheld by Western scholars of the Orient. In either case, the East constitutes the Other, a body wholly separate and alien from the West; it is defined by a uniquely spiritual and nonrational "essence," even if this essence is valorized quite differently by the two schools. Eastern man exhibits a spiritual dependence with respect to nature—on the one hand, this is symptomatic of his prescientific and backward self, on the other, of his ecological wisdom and deep ecological consciousness. Both views are monolithic, simplistic, and have the characteristic effect—intended in one case, perhaps unintended in the other—of denying agency and reason to the East and making it the privileged orbit of Western thinkers.

The two apparently opposed perspectives have then a common underlying structure of discourse in which the East merely serves as a vehicle for Western projections. Varying images of the East are raw material for political and cultural battles being played out in the West; they tell us far more about the Western commentator and his desires than about the "East." Inden's remarks apply not merely to Western scholarship on India, but to Orientalist constructions of China and Japan as well:

Although these two views appear to be strongly opposed, they often combine together. Both have a similar interest in sustaining the Otherness of India. The holders of the dominant view, best exemplified in the past in imperial administra-

⁸ Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 120.

tive discourse (and today probably by that of 'development economics'), would place a traditional, superstition-ridden India in a position of perpetual tutelage to a modern, rational West. The adherents of the romantic view, best exemplified academically in the discourses of Christian liberalism and analytic psychology, concede the realm of the public and impersonal to the positivist. Taking their succour not from governments and big business, but from a plethora of religious foundations and self-help institutes, and from allies in the 'consciousness industry,' not to mention the important industry of tourism, the romantics insist that India embodies a private realm of the imagination and the religious which modern, western man lacks but needs. They, therefore, like the positivists, but for just the opposite reason, have a vested interest in seeing that the Orientalist view of India as 'spiritual,' 'mysterious,' and 'exotic' is perpetuated.⁹

(4) How radical, finally, are the deep ecologists? Notwithstanding their self-image and strident rhetoric (in which the label "shallow ecology" has an opprobrium similar to that reserved for "social democratic" by Marxist-Leninists), even within the American context their radicalism is limited and it manifests itself quite differently elsewhere.

To my mind, deep ecology is best viewed as a radical trend within the wilderness preservation movement. Although advancing philosophical rather than aesthetic arguments and encouraging political militancy rather than negotiation, its practical emphasis—viz., preservation of unspoiled nature—is virtually identical. For the mainstream movement, the function of wilderness is to provide a temporary antidote to modern civilization. As a special institution within an industrialized society, the national park "provides an opportunity for respite, contrast, contemplation, and affirmation of values for those who live most of their lives in the workaday world."¹⁰ Indeed, the rapid increase in visitations to the national parks in postwar America is a direct consequence of economic expansion. The emergence of a popular interest in wilderness sites, the historian Samuel Hays points out, was "not a throwback to the primitive, but an integral part of the modern standard of living as people sought to add new 'amenity' and

⁹ Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," *Modern Asian Studies* 20 (1986): 442. Inden draws inspiration from Edward Said's forceful polemic, *Orientalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). It must be noted, however, that there is a salient difference between Western perceptions of Middle Eastern and Far Eastern cultures respectively. Due perhaps to the long history of Christian conflict with Islam, Middle Eastern cultures (as Said documents) are consistently presented in pejorative terms. The juxtaposition of hostile and worshiping attitudes that Inden talks of applies only to Western attitudes toward Buddhist and Hindu societies.

¹⁰ Joseph Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), p. 42. Cf. also Peter Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), and Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

'aesthetic' goals and desires to their earlier preoccupation with necessities and conveniences."¹¹

Here, the enjoyment of nature is an integral part of the consumer society. The private automobile (and the life style it has spawned) is in many respects the ultimate ecological villain, and an untouched wilderness the prototype of ecological harmony; yet, for most Americans it is perfectly consistent to drive a thousand miles to spend a holiday in a national park. They possess a vast, beautiful, and sparsely populated continent and are also able to draw upon the natural resources of large portions of the globe by virtue of their economic and political dominance. In consequence, America can simultaneously enjoy the material benefits of an expanding economy and the aesthetic benefits of unspoiled nature. The two poles of "wilderness" and "civilization" mutually coexist in an internally coherent whole, and philosophers of both poles are assigned a prominent place in this culture. Paradoxically as it may seem, it is no accident that Star Wars technology and deep ecology both find their fullest expression in that leading sector of Western civilization, California.

Deep ecology runs parallel to the consumer society without seriously questioning its ecological and socio-political basis. In its celebration of American wilderness, it also displays an uncomfortable convergence with the prevailing climate of nationalism in the American wilderness movement. For spokesmen such as the historian Roderick Nash, the national park system is America's distinctive cultural contribution to the world, reflective not merely of its economic but of its philosophical and ecological maturity as well. In what Walter Lippman called the American century, the "American invention of national parks" must be exported worldwide. Betraying an economic determinism that would make even a Marxist shudder, Nash believes that environmental preservation is a "full stomach" phenomenon that is confined to the rich, urban, and sophisticated. Nonetheless, he hopes that "the less developed nations may eventually evolve economically and intellectually to the point where nature preservation is more than a business."¹²

The error which Nash makes (and which deep ecology in some respects encourages) is to equate environmental protection with the protection of wilderness. This is a distinctively American notion, borne out of a unique social and environmental history. The archetypal concerns of radical environmentalists in

¹¹ Samuel Hays, "From Conservation to Environment: Environmental Politics in the United States since World War Two," *Environmental Review* 6 (1982): 21. See also the same author's book entitled *Beauty, Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-85* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹² Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

other cultural contexts are in fact quite different. The German Greens, for example, have elaborated a devastating critique of industrial society which turns on the acceptance of environmental limits to growth. Pointing to the intimate links between industrialization, militarization, and conquest, the Greens argue that economic growth in the West has historically rested on the economic and ecological exploitation of the Third World. Rudolf Bahro is characteristically blunt:

The working class here [in the West] is the richest lower class in the world. And if I look at the problem from the point of view of the whole of humanity, not just from that of Europe, then I must say that the metropolitan working class is the worst exploiting class in history. . . . What made poverty bearable in eighteenth or nineteenth-century Europe was the prospect of escaping it through exploitation of the periphery. But this is no longer a possibility, and continued industrialism in the Third World will mean poverty for whole generations and hunger for millions.¹³

Here the roots of global ecological problems lie in the disproportionate share of resources consumed by the industrialized countries as a whole *and* the urban elite within the Third World. Since it is impossible to reproduce an industrial monoculture worldwide, the ecological movement in the West must begin by cleaning up its own act. The Greens advocate the creation of a “no growth” economy, to be achieved by scaling down current (and clearly unsustainable) consumption levels.¹⁴ This radical shift in consumption and production patterns requires the creation of alternate economic and political structures—smaller in scale and more amenable to social participation—but it rests equally on a shift in cultural values. The expansionist character of modern Western man will have to give way to an ethic of renunciation and self-limitation, in which spiritual and communal values play an increasing role in sustaining social life. This revolution in cultural values, however, has as its point of departure an understanding of environmental processes quite different from deep ecology.

Many elements of the Green program find a strong resonance in countries such as India, where a history of Western colonialism and industrial development has benefited only a tiny elite while exacting tremendous social and environmental costs. The ecological battles presently being fought in India have as their

¹³ Rudolf Bahro, *From Red to Green* (London: Verso Books, 1984).

¹⁴ From time to time, American scholars have themselves criticized these imbalances in consumption patterns. In the 1950s, William Vogt made the charge that the United States, with one-sixteenth of the world's population, was utilizing one-third of the globe's resources. (Vogt, cited in E. F. Murphy, *Nature, Bureaucracy and the Rule of Property* [Amsterdam: North Holland, 1977, p. 29]). More recently, Zero Population Growth has estimated that each American consumes thirty-nine times as many resources as an Indian. See *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 March 1987.

epicenter the conflict over nature between the subsistence and largely rural sector and the vastly more powerful commercial-industrial sector. Perhaps the most celebrated of these battles concerns the Chipko (Hug the Tree) movement, a peasant movement against deforestation in the Himalayan foothills. Chipko is only one of several movements that have sharply questioned the nonsustainable demand being placed on the land and vegetative base by urban centers and industry. These include opposition to large dams by displaced peasants, the conflict between small artisan fishing and large-scale trawler fishing for export, the countrywide movements against commercial forest operations, and opposition to industrial pollution among downstream agricultural and fishing communities.¹⁵

Two features distinguish these environmental movements from their Western counterparts. First, for the sections of society most critically affected by environmental degradation—poor and landless peasants, women, and tribals—it is a question of sheer survival, not of enhancing the quality of life. Second, and as a consequence, the environmental solutions they articulate deeply involve questions of equity as well as economic and political redistribution. Highlighting these differences, a leading Indian environmentalist stresses that “environmental protection per se is of least concern to most of these groups. Their main concern is about the use of the environment and who should benefit from it.”¹⁶ They seek to wrest control of nature away from the state and the industrial sector and place it in the hands of rural communities who live within that environment but are increasingly denied access to it. These communities have far more basic needs, their demands on the environment are far less intense, and they can draw upon a reservoir of cooperative social institutions and local ecological knowledge in managing the “commons”—forests, grasslands, and the waters—on a sustainable basis. If colonial and capitalist expansion has both accentuated social inequalities and signaled a precipitous fall in ecological wisdom, an alternate ecology must rest on an alternate society and polity as well.

This brief overview of German and Indian environmentalism has some major implications for deep ecology. Both German and Indian environmental traditions allow for a greater integration of ecological concerns with livelihood and work. They also place a greater emphasis on equity and social justice (both within individual countries and on a global scale) on the grounds that in the absence of social regeneration environmental regeneration has very little chance of succeed-

¹⁵ For an excellent review, see Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, eds., *India: The State of the Environment 1984–85: A Citizens Report* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1985). Cf. also Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Indian Himalaya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

¹⁶ Anil Agarwal, “Human-Nature Interactions in a Third World Country,” *The Environmentalist* 6, no. 3 (1986): 167.

ing. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, they have escaped the preoccupation with wilderness preservation so characteristic of American cultural and environmental history.¹⁷

IV. A HOMILY

In 1958, the economist J. K. Galbraith referred to overconsumption as the unasked question of the American conservation movement. There is a marked selectivity, he wrote, "in the conservationist's approach to materials consumption. If we are concerned about our great appetite for materials, it is plausible to seek to increase the supply, to decrease waste, to make better use of the stocks available, and to develop substitutes. But what of the appetite itself? Surely this is the ultimate source of the problem. If it continues its geometric course, will it not one day have to be restrained? Yet in the literature of the resource problem this is the forbidden question. Over it hangs a nearly total silence."¹⁸

The consumer economy and society have expanded tremendously in the three decades since Galbraith penned these words; yet his criticisms are nearly as valid today. I have said "nearly," for there are some hopeful signs. Within the environmental movement several dispersed groups are working to develop ecologically benign technologies and to encourage less wasteful life styles. Moreover, outside the self-defined boundaries of American environmentalism, opposition to the permanent war economy is being carried on by a peace movement that has a distinguished history and impeccable moral and political credentials.

It is precisely these (to my mind, most hopeful) components of the American social scene that are missing from deep ecology. In their widely noticed book, Bill Devall and George Sessions make no mention of militarization or the movements for peace, while activists whose practical focus is on developing ecologically responsible life styles (e.g., Wendell Berry) are derided as "falling short of deep ecological awareness."¹⁹ A truly radical ecology in the American context ought to work toward a synthesis of the appropriate technology, alternate

¹⁷ One strand in radical American environmentalism, the bioregional movement, by emphasizing a greater involvement with the bioregion people inhabit, does indirectly challenge consumerism. However, as yet bioregionalism has hardly raised the questions of equity and social justice (international, intranational, and intergenerational) which I argue must be a central plank of radical environmentalism. Moreover, its stress on (individual) *experience* as the key to involvement with nature is also somewhat at odds with the integration of nature with livelihood and work that I talk of in this paper. Cf. Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985).

¹⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, "How Much Should a Country Consume?" in Henry Jarrett, ed., *Perspectives on Conservation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), pp. 91-92.

¹⁹ Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 122. For Wendell Berry's own assessment of deep ecology, see his "Amplifications: Preserving Wildness," *Wilderness* 50 (Spring 1987): 39-40, 50-54.

life style, and peace movements.²⁰ By making the (largely spurious) anthropocentric-biocentric distinction central to the debate, deep ecologists may have appropriated the moral high ground, but they are at the same time doing a serious disservice to American and global environmentalism.²¹

²⁰ See the interesting recent contribution by one of the most influential spokesmen of appropriate technology—Barry Commoner, “A Reporter at Large: The Environment,” *New Yorker*, 15 June 1987. While Commoner makes a forceful plea for the convergence of the environmental movement (viewed by him primarily as the opposition to air and water pollution and to the institutions that generate such pollution) and the peace movement, he significantly does not mention consumption patterns, implying that “limits to growth” do not exist.

²¹ In this sense, my critique of deep ecology, although that of an outsider, may facilitate the reassertion of those elements in the American environmental tradition for which there is a profound sympathy in other parts of the globe. A global perspective may also lead to a critical reassessment of figures such as Aldo Leopold and John Muir, the two patron saints of deep ecology. As Donald Worster has pointed out, the message of Muir (and, I would argue, of Leopold as well) makes sense only in an American context; he has very little to say to other cultures. See Worster’s review of Stephen Fox’s *John Muir and His Legacy*, in *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 277–81.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism

VAL PLUMWOOD

Rationalism is the key to the connected oppressions of women and nature in the West. Deep ecology has failed to provide an adequate historical perspective or an adequate challenge to human/nature dualism. A relational account of self enables us to reject an instrumental view of nature and develop an alternative based on respect without denying that nature is distinct from the self. This shift of focus links feminist, environmentalist, and certain forms of socialist critiques. The critique of anthropocentrism is not sacrificed, as deep ecologists argue, but enriched.

Environmental philosophy has recently been criticized on a number of counts by feminist philosophers. I want to develop further some of this critique and to suggest that much of the issue turns on the failure of environmental philosophy to engage properly with the rationalist tradition, which has been inimical to both women and nature. Damaging assumptions from this tradition have been employed in attempting to formulate a new environmental philosophy that often makes use of or embeds itself within rationalist philosophical frameworks that are not only biased from a gender perspective, but have claimed a negative role for nature as well.

In sections I. through IV. I argue that current mainstream brands of environmental philosophy, both those based in ethics and those based in deep ecology, suffer from this problem, that neither has an adequate historical analysis, and that both continue to rely implicitly upon rationalist-inspired accounts of the self that have been a large part of the problem. In sections V. and VI. I show how the critique of rationalism offers an understanding of a range of key broader issues that environmental philosophy has tended to neglect or treat in too narrow a way. Among these issues are those connected with concepts of the human self and with instrumentalism.

I. RATIONALISM AND THE ETHICAL APPROACH

The ethical approach aims to center a new view of nature in ethics, especially universalizing ethics or in some extension of human ethics. This approach has been criticized from a feminist perspective by a number of recent authors (especially Cheney 1987, 1989). I partly agree with and partly disagree with these criticisms; that is, I think that the emphasis on ethics as the central part (or even the whole) of the problem is misplaced, and that although ethics (and especially the ethics of non-instrumental value) has a role, the particular ethical approaches that have been adopted are problematic and unsuitable. I shall illustrate this claim by a brief discussion of two recent books: Paul Taylor's *Respect for Nature* (1986) and Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* (1986). Both works are significant, and indeed impressive, contributions to their respective areas.

Paul Taylor's book is a detailed working out of an ethical position that rejects the standard and widespread Western treatment of nature as instrumental to human interests and instead takes living things, as teleological centers of life, to be worthy of respect in their own right. Taylor aims to defend a biocentric (life-centered) ethical theory in which a person's true human self includes his or her biological nature (Taylor 1986, 44), but he attempts to embed this within a Kantian ethical framework that makes strong use of the reason/emotion dichotomy. Thus we are assured that the attitude of respect is a moral one because it is universalizing and disinterested, "that is, each moral agent who sincerely has the attitude advocates its universal adoption by all other agents, regardless of whether they are so inclined and regardless of their fondness or lack of fondness for particular individuals" (41). The essential features of morality having been established as distance from emotion and "particular fondness," morality is then seen as the domain of reason and its touchstone, belief. Having carefully distinguished the "valuational, conative, practical and affective dimensions of the attitude of respect," Taylor goes on to pick out the essentially cognitive "valuational" aspect as central and basic to all the others: "It is *because* moral agents look at animals and plants in this way that they are disposed to pursue the aforementioned ends and purposes" (82) and, similarly, to have the relevant emotions and affective attitudes. The latter must be held at an appropriate distance and not allowed to get the upper hand at any point. Taylor claims that actions do not express moral respect unless they are done as a matter of moral principle conceived as ethically obligatory and pursued disinterestedly and not through inclination, solely or even primarily:

If one seeks that end solely or primarily from inclination, the attitude being expressed is not moral respect but personal affection or love. . . . It is not that respect for nature *precludes* feelings of care and concern for living things. One may, as a

matter of simple kindness, not want to harm them. But the fact that one is so motivated does not itself indicate the presence of a moral attitude of respect. Having the desire to preserve or protect the good of wild animals and plants for their sake is neither contrary to, nor evidence of, respect for nature. It is only if the person who has the desire understands that the actions fulfilling it would be obligatory even in the absence of the desire, that the person has genuine respect for nature. (85-86)

There is good reason to reject as self-indulgent the “kindness” approach that reduces respect and morality in the protection of animals to the satisfaction of the carer’s own feelings. Respect for others involves treating them as worthy of consideration for their own sake and not just as an instrument for the carer’s satisfaction, and there is a sense in which such “kindness” is not genuine care or respect for the other. But Taylor is doing much more than this—he is treating care, viewed as “inclination” or “desire,” as irrelevant to morality. Respect for nature on this account becomes an essentially *cognitive* matter (that of a person believing something to have “inherent worth” and then acting from an understanding of ethical principles as universal).

The account draws on the familiar view of reason and emotion as sharply separated and opposed, and of “desire,” caring, and love as merely “personal” and “particular” as opposed to the universality and impartiality of understanding and of “feminine” emotions as essentially unreliable, untrustworthy, and morally irrelevant, an inferior domain to be dominated by a superior, disinterested (and of course masculine) reason. This sort of rationalist account of the place of emotions has come in for a great deal of well-deserved criticism recently, both for its implicit gender bias and its philosophical inadequacy, especially its dualism and its construal of public reason as sharply differentiated from and controlling private emotion (see, for example, Benhabib 1987; Blum 1980; Gilligan 1982, 1987; Lloyd 1983a and 1983b).

A further major problem in its use in this context is the inconsistency of employing, in the service of constructing an allegedly biocentric ethical theory, a framework that has itself played such a major role in creating a dualistic account of the genuine human self as essentially rational and as sharply discontinuous from the merely emotional, the merely bodily, and the merely animal elements. For emotions and the private sphere with which they are associated have been treated as sharply differentiated and inferior as part of a pattern in which they are seen as linked to the sphere of nature, not the realm of reason.

And it is not only women but also the earth’s wild living things that have been denied possession of a reason thus construed along masculine and oppositional lines and which contrasts not only with the “feminine” emotions but also with the physical and the animal. Much of the problem (both for women and nature) lies in rationalist or rationalist-derived conceptions of the

self and of what is essential and valuable in the human makeup. It is in the name of such a reason that these other things—the feminine, the emotional, the merely bodily or the merely animal, and the natural world itself—have most often been denied their virtue and been accorded an inferior and merely instrumental position. Thomas Aquinas states this problematic positions succinctly: “the intellectual nature is alone requisite for its own sake in the universe, and all others for its sake” (Thomas Aquinas 1976, 56). And it is precisely reason so construed that is usually taken to characterize the authentically human and to create the supposedly sharp separation, cleavage, or discontinuity between all humans and the nonhuman world, and the similar cleavage within the human self. The supremacy accorded an oppositionally construed reason is the key to the anthropocentrism of the Western tradition. The Kantian-rationalist framework, then, is hardly the area in which to search for a solution. Its use, in a way that perpetuates the supremacy of reason and its opposition to contrast areas, in the service of constructing a supposedly biocentric ethic is a matter for astonishment.

Ethical universalization and abstraction are both closely associated with accounts of the self in terms of rational egoism. Universalization is explicitly seen in both the Kantian and the Rawlsian framework as needed to hold in check natural self-interest; it is the moral complement to the account of the self as “disembodied and disembedded,” as the autonomous self of liberal theory, the rational egoist of market theory, the falsely differentiated self of object-relations theory (Benhabib 1987; Poole 1984, 1985). In the same vein, the broadening of the scope of moral concern along with the according of rights to the natural world has been seen by influential environmental philosophers (Leopold 1949, 201-2) as the final step in a process of increasing moral abstraction and generalization, part of the move away from the merely particular—*my self, my family, my tribe*—the discarding of the merely personal and, by implication, the merely selfish. This is viewed as moral progress, increasingly civilized as it moves further away from primitive selfishness. Nature is the last area to be included in this march away from the unbridled natural egoism of the particular and its close ally, the emotional. Moral progress is marked by increasing adherence to moral rules and a movement away from the supposedly natural (in human nature), and the completion of its empire is, paradoxically, the extension of its domain of adherence to abstract moral rules to nature itself.

On such a view, the particular and the emotional are seen as the enemy of the rational, as corrupting, capricious, and self-interested. And if the “moral emotions” are set aside as irrelevant or suspect, as merely subjective or personal, we can only base morality on the rules of abstract reason, on the justice and rights of the impersonal public sphere.

This view of morality as based on a concept of reason as oppositional to the personal, the particular, and the emotional has been assumed in the framework of much recent environmental ethics. But as a number of feminist critics of

the masculine model of moral life and of moral abstraction have pointed out (Blum 1980, Nicholson 1983), this increasing abstraction is not necessarily an improvement. The opposition between the care and concern for particular others and generalized moral concern is associated with a sharp division between public (masculine) and private (feminine) realms. Thus it is part of the set of dualistic contrasts in which the problem of the Western treatment of nature is rooted. And the opposition between care for particular others and general moral concern is a false one. There *can* be opposition between particularity and generality of concern, as when concern for particular others is accompanied by *exclusion* of others from care or chauvinistic attitudes toward them (Blum 1980, 80), but this does not automatically happen, and emphasis on oppositional cases obscures the frequent cases where they work together—and in which care for particular others is essential to a more generalized morality. Special relationships, which are treated by universalizing positions as at best morally irrelevant and at worst a positive hindrance to the moral life, are thus mistreated. For as Blum (1980, 78-83) stresses, special relationships form the basis for much of our moral life and concern, and it could hardly be otherwise. With nature, as with the human sphere, the capacity to care, to experience sympathy, understanding, and sensitivity to the situation and fate of particular others, and to take responsibility for others is an index of our moral being. Special relationship with, care for, or empathy with particular aspects of nature as experiences rather than with nature as abstraction are essential to provide a depth and type of concern that is not otherwise possible. Care and responsibility for particular animals, trees, and rivers that are known well, loved, and appropriately connected to the self are an important basis for acquiring a wider, more generalized concern. (As we shall see, this failure to deal adequately with particularity is a problem for deep ecology as well.)

Concern for nature, then, should not be viewed as the completion of a process of (masculine) universalization, moral abstraction, and disconnection, discarding the self, emotions, and special ties (all, of course, associated with the private sphere and femininity). Environmental ethics has for the most part placed itself uncritically in such a framework, although it is one that is extended with particular difficulty to the natural world. Perhaps the kindest thing that can be said about the framework of ethical universalization is that it is seriously incomplete and fails to capture the most important elements of respect, which are not reducible to or based on duty or obligation any more than the most important elements of friendship are, but which are rather an expression of a certain kind of selfhood and a certain kind of relation between self and other.

II. RATIONALISM, RIGHTS, AND ETHICS

An extension to nature of the standard concepts of morality is also the aim of Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* (1986). This is the most impressive,

thorough, and solidly argued book in the area of animal ethics, with excellent chapters on topics such as animal intentionality. But the key concept upon which this account of moral concern for animals is based is that of rights, which requires strong individual separation of rights-holders and is set in a framework of human community and legality. Its extension to the natural world raises a host of problems (Midgley 1983, 61-64). Even in the case of individual higher animals for which Regan uses this concept of rights, the approach is problematic. His concept of rights is based on Mill's notion that, if a being has a right to something not only should he or she (or it) have that thing but others are obliged to intervene to secure it. The application of this concept of rights to individual wild living animals appears to give humans almost limitless obligations to intervene massively in all sorts of far reaching and conflicting ways in natural cycles to secure the rights of a bewildering variety of beings. In the case of the wolf and the sheep, an example discussed by Regan, it is unclear whether humans should intervene to protect the sheep's rights or to avoid doing so in order not to violate the wolf's right to its natural food.

Regan attempts to meet this objection by claiming that since the wolf is not itself a moral agent (although it is a moral patient), it cannot violate the sheep's rights not to suffer a painful and violent death (Regan 1986, 285). But the defense is unconvincing, because even if we concede that the wolf is not a moral agent, it still does not follow that on a rights view we are not obliged to intervene. From the fact that the wolf is not a moral agent it only follows that it is not *responsible* for violating the sheep's rights, not that they are not violated or that others do not have an obligation (according to the rights view) to intervene. If the wolf were attacking a human baby, it would hardly do as a defense in that case to claim that one did not have a duty to intervene because the wolf was not a moral agent. But on Regan's view the baby and the sheep do have something like the same rights. So we do have a duty, it seems, (on the rights view) to intervene to protect the sheep—leaving us where with the wolf?

The concept of rights seems to produce absurd consequences and is impossible to apply in the context of predators in a natural ecosystem, as opposed to a particular human social context in which claimants are part of a reciprocal social community and conflict cases either few or settleable according to some agreed-on principles. All this seems to me to tell against the concept of rights as the correct one for the general task of dealing with animals in the natural environment (as opposed, of course, to domestic animals in a basically humanized environment).¹

Rights seem to have acquired an exaggerated importance as part of the prestige of the public sphere and the masculine, and the emphasis on separation and autonomy, on reason and abstraction. A more promising approach for an ethics of nature, and also one much more in line with the current directions in feminism, would be to remove rights from the center of the moral stage and

pay more attention to some other, less dualistic, moral concepts such as respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship, and responsibility (Cook 1977, 118-9). These concepts, because of their dualistic construal as feminine and their consignment to the private sphere as subjective and emotional, have been treated as peripheral and given far less importance than they deserve for several reasons. First, rationalism and the prestige of reason and the public sphere have influenced not only the concept of what morality is (as Taylor explicates it, for example, as essentially a rational and cognitive act of understanding that certain actions are ethically obligatory) but of what is *central* to it or what count as moral concepts. Second, concepts such as respect, care, concern, and so on are resistant to analysis along lines of a dualistic reason/emotion dichotomy, and their construal along these lines has involved confusion and distortion (Blum 1980). They *are* moral "feelings" but they involve reason, behavior and emotion in ways that do not seem separable. Rationalist-inspired ethical concepts are highly ethnocentric and cannot account adequately for the views of many indigenous peoples, and the attempted application of these rationalist concepts to their positions tends to lead to the view that they lack a real ethical framework (Plumwood 1990). These alternative concepts seem better able to apply to the views of such peoples, whose ethic of respect, care and responsibility for land is often based on special relationships with particular areas of land via links to kin (Neidjie, 1985, 1989). Finally these concepts, which allow for particularity and mostly do not require reciprocity, are precisely the sorts of concepts feminist philosophers have argued should have a more significant place in ethics at the expense of abstract, malestream concepts from the public sphere such as rights and justice (Gilligan 1982, 1987, Benhabib 1987). The ethic of care and responsibility they have articulated seems to extend much less problematically to the nonhuman world than do the impersonal concepts which are currently seen as central, and it also seems capable of providing an excellent basis for the *noninstrumental treatment of nature* many environmental philosophers have now called for. Such an approach treats ethical relations as an expression of self-in-relationship (Gilligan 1987, 24) rather than as the discarding, containment, or generalization of a self viewed as self-interested and non-relational, as in the conventional ethics of universalization.² As I argue later, there are important connections between this relational account of the self and the rejection of instrumentalism.

It is not that we need to abandon ethics or dispense with the universalized ethical approach entirely, although we do need to reassess the centrality of ethics in environmental philosophy.³ What is needed is not so much the abandonment of ethics as a different and richer understanding of it (and, as I argue later, a richer understanding of environmental philosophy generally than is provided by ethics), one that gives an important place to ethical concepts owing to emotionality and particularity and that abandons the exclusive

focus on the universal and the abstract associated with the nonrelational self and the dualistic and oppositional accounts of the reason/emotion and universal/particular contrasts as given in rationalist accounts of ethics.

III. THE DISCONTINUITY PROBLEM

The problem is not just one of restriction *in* ethics but also of restriction *to* ethics. Most mainstream environmental philosophers continue to view environmental philosophy as mainly concerned with ethics. For example, instrumentalism is generally viewed by mainstream environmental philosophers as a problem in ethics, and its solution is seen as setting up some sort of theory of intrinsic value. This neglects a key aspect of the overall problem that is concerned with the definition of the human self as separate from nature, the connection between this and the instrumental view of nature, and broader *political* aspects of the critique of instrumentalism.

One key aspect of the Western view of nature, which the ethical stance neglects completely, is the view of nature as sharply discontinuous or ontologically divided from the human sphere. This leads to a view of humans as apart from or "outside of" nature, usually as masters or external controllers of it. Attempts to reject this view often speak alternatively of humans as "part of nature" but rarely distinguish this position from the obvious claim that human fate is interconnected with that of the biosphere, that humans are subject to natural laws. But on the divided-self theory it is the essentially or authentically human part of the self, and in that sense the human realm proper, that is outside nature, not the human as a physical phenomenon. The view of humans as outside of and alien to nature seems to be especially strongly a Western one, although not confined to the West. There are many other cultures which do not hold it, which stress what connects us to nature as genuinely human virtues, which emphasize continuity and not dissimilarity.⁴

As ecofeminism points out, Western thought has given us a strong human/nature dualism that is part of the set of interrelated dualisms of mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine and has important interconnected features with these other dualisms.⁵ This dualism has been especially stressed in the rationalist tradition. In this dualism what is characteristically and authentically human is defined against or in opposition to what is taken to be natural, nature, or the physical or biological realm. This takes various forms. For example, the characterization of the genuinely, properly, characteristically, or authentically human, or of human virtue, in polarized terms to exclude what is taken to be characteristic of the natural is what John Rodman (1980) has called "the Differential Imperative" in which what is virtuous in the human is taken to be what maximizes distance from the merely natural. The maintenance of sharp dichotomy and polarization is achieved by the rejection and denial of what links humans to the animal. What is taken to

be authentically and characteristically human, defining of the human, as well as the ideal for which humans should strive is *not* to be found in what is shared with the natural and animal (e.g., the body, sexuality, reproduction, emotionality, the senses, agency) but in what is thought to separate and distinguish them—especially reason and its offshoots. Hence humanity is defined not as part of nature (perhaps a special part) but as separate from and in opposition to it. Thus the relation of humans to nature is treated as an oppositional and value dualism.

The process closely parallels the formation of other dualisms, such as masculine/feminine, reason/emotion, and spirit/body criticized in feminist thought (see, for example, Ruether 1975, Griffin 1978, Griscom 1981, King 1981, Lloyd 1983, Jaggar 1983) but this parallel logic is not the only connection between human/nature dualism and masculine/feminine dualism. Moreover, this exclusion of the natural from the concept of the properly human is not the only dualism involved, because what is involved in the construction of this dualistic conception of the human is the rejection of those parts of the human character identified as feminine—also identified as less than fully human—giving the masculine conception of what it is to be human. Masculinity can be linked to this exclusionary and polarized conception of the human, via the desire to exclude and distance from the feminine and the nonhuman. The features that are taken as characteristic of humankind and as where its special virtues lie, are those such as rationality, freedom, and transcendence of nature (all traditionally viewed as masculine), which are viewed as not shared with nature. Humanity is defined oppositionally to both nature and the feminine.

The upshot is a deeply entrenched view of the genuine or ideal human self as not including features shared with nature, and as defined *against* or in *opposition* to the nonhuman realm, so that the human sphere and that of nature cannot significantly overlap. Nature is sharply divided off from the human, is alien and usually hostile and inferior. Furthermore, this kind of human self can only have certain kinds of accidental or contingent connections to the realm of nature. I shall call this the discontinuity problem or thesis and I argue later that it plays a key role with respect to other elements of the problem.

IV. RATIONALISM AND DEEP ECOLOGY

Although the discontinuity problem is generally neglected by the ethical stance, a significant exception to its neglect within environmental philosophy seems to be found in deep ecology, which is also critical of the location of the problem within ethics.⁶ Furthermore, deep ecology also seems initially to be more likely to be compatible with a feminist philosophical framework, emphasizing as it does connections with the self, connectedness, and merger. Nevertheless, there are severe tensions between deep ecology and a feminist

perspective. Deep ecology has not satisfactorily identified the key elements in the traditional framework or observed their connections to rationalism. As a result, it fails to reject adequately rationalist assumptions and indeed often seems to provide its own versions of universalization, the discarding of particular connections, and rationalist accounts of self.

Deep ecology locates the key problem area in human-nature relations in the separation of humans and nature, and it provides a solution for this in terms of the "identification" of self with nature. "Identification" is usually left deliberately vague, and corresponding accounts of self are various and shifting and not always compatible.⁷ There seem to be at least three different accounts of self involved—indistinguishability, expansion of self, and transcendence of self—and practitioners appear to feel free to move among them at will. As I shall show, all are unsatisfactory from both a feminist perspective and from that of obtaining a satisfactory environmental philosophy, and the appeal of deep ecology rests largely on the failure to distinguish them.

A. THE INDISTINGUISHABILITY ACCOUNT

The indistinguishability account rejects boundaries between self and nature. Humans are said to be just one strand in the biotic web, not the source and ground of all value and the discontinuity thesis is, it seems, firmly rejected. Warwick Fox describes the central intuition of deep ecology as follows: "We can make no firm ontological divide in the field of existence . . . there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and nonhuman realms. . . . to the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness" (Fox 1984, 7). But much more is involved here than the rejection of discontinuity, for deep ecology goes on to replace the human-in-environment image by a holistic or gestalt view that "dissolves not only the human-in-environment concept, but every compact-thing-in-milieu concept"—except when talking at a superficial level of communication (Fox 1984, 1). Deep ecology involves a cosmology of "unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of the analyzability of the world into separately and independently existing parts."⁸ It is strongly attracted to a variety of mystical traditions and to the Perennial Philosophy, in which the self is merged with the other—"the other is none other than yourself." As John Seed puts it: "I am protecting the rain forest" develops into "I am part of the rain forest protecting myself. I am that part of the rain forest recently emerged into thinking" (Seed et al. 1988, 36).

There are severe problems with these claims, arising not so much from the orientation to the concept of self (which seems to me important and correct) or from the mystical character of the insights themselves as from the indistinguishability metaphysics which is proposed as their basis. It is not merely that the identification process of which deep ecologists speak seems to stand in need

of much more clarification, but that it does the wrong thing. The problem, in the sort of account I have given, is the discontinuity between humans and nature that emerges as part of the overall set of Western dualisms. Deep ecology proposes to heal this division by a "unifying process," a metaphysics that insists that everything is really part of and indistinguishable from everything else. This is not only to employ overly powerful tools but ones that do the wrong job, for the origins of the particular opposition involved in the human/nature dualism remain unaddressed and unanalyzed. The real basis of the discontinuity lies in the concept of an authentic human being, in what is taken to be valuable in human character, society, and culture, as what is distinct from what is taken to be natural. The sources of and remedies for this remain unaddressed in deep ecology. Deep ecology has confused dualism and atomism and then mistakenly taken indistinguishability to follow from the rejection of atomism. The confusion is clear in Fox, who proceeds immediately from the ambiguous claim that there is no "bifurcation in reality between the human and nonhuman realms" (which could be taken as a rejection of human discontinuity from nature) to the conclusion that what is needed is that we embrace an indistinguishability metaphysics of unbroken wholeness in the whole of reality. But the problem must be addressed in terms of this specific dualism and its connections. Instead deep ecology proposes the obliteration of all distinction.

Thus deep ecology's solution to removing this discontinuity by obliterating *all* division is far too powerful. In its overgenerality it fails to provide a genuine basis for an environmental ethics of the kind sought, for the view of humans as metaphysically unified with the cosmic whole will be equally true whatever relation humans stand in with nature—the situation of exploitation of nature exemplifies such unity equally as well as a conserver situation and the human self is just as indistinguishable from the bulldozer and Coca-Cola bottle as the rocks or the rain forest. What John Seed seems to have in mind here is that once one has realized that one is indistinguishable from the rain forest, its needs would become one's own. But there is nothing to guarantee this—one could equally well take one's own needs for its.

This points to a further problem with the indistinguishability thesis, that we need to recognize not only our human continuity with the natural world but also its distinctness and independence from us and the distinctness of the needs of things in nature from ours. The indistinguishability account does not allow for this, although it is a very important part of respect for nature and of conservation strategy.

The dangers of accounts of the self that involve self-merger appear in feminist contexts as well, where they are sometimes appealed to as the alternative to masculine-defined autonomy as disconnection from others. As Jean Grimshaw writes of the related thesis of the indistinctness of persons (the acceptance of the loss of self-boundaries as a feminine ideal): "It is important

not merely because certain forms of symbiosis or 'connection' with others can lead to damaging failures of personal development, but because care for others, understanding of them, are only possible if one can adequately distinguish oneself *from* others. If I see myself as 'indistinct' from you, or you as not having your own being that is not merged with mine, then I cannot preserve a real sense of your well-being as opposed to mine. Care and understanding require the sort of distance that is needed in order not to see the other as a projection of self, or self as a continuation of the other" (Grimshaw 1986, 182-3).

These points seem to me to apply to caring for other species and for the natural world as much as they do to caring for our own species. But just as dualism is confused with atomism, so holistic self-merger is taken to be the only alternative to egoistic accounts of the self as without essential connection to others or to nature. Fortunately, this is a false choice;⁹ as I argue below, nonholistic but relational accounts of the self, as developed in some feminist and social philosophy, enable a rejection of dualism, including human/nature dualism, without denying the independence or distinguishability of the other. To the extent that deep ecology is identified with the indistinguishability thesis, it does not provide an adequate basis for a philosophy of nature.

C. THE EXPANDED SELF

In fairness to deep ecology it should be noted that it tends to vacillate between mystical indistinguishability and the other accounts of self, between the holistic self and the expanded self. Vacillation occurs often by way of slipperiness as to what is meant by identification of self with the other, a key notion in deep ecology. This slipperiness reflects the confusion of dualism and atomism previously noted but also seems to reflect a desire to retain the mystical appeal of indistinguishability while avoiding its many difficulties. Where "identification" means not "identity" but something more like "empathy," identification with other beings can lead to an expanded self. According to Arne Naess, "The self is as comprehensive as the totality of our identifications. . . . Our Self is that with which we identify."¹⁰ This larger self (or Self, to deep ecologists) is something for which we should strive "insofar as it is in our power to do so" (Fox 1986, 13-19), and according to Fox we should also strive to make it as large as possible. But this expanded self is not the result of a critique of egoism; rather, it is an enlargement and an extension of egoism.¹¹ It does not question the structures of possessive egoism and self-interest; rather, it tries to allow for a wider set of interests by an expansion of self. The motivation for the expansion of self is to allow for a wider set of concerns while continuing to allow the self to operate on the fuel of self-interest (or Self-interest). This is apparent from the claim that "in this light . . . ecological resistance is simply another name for self defense" (Fox 1986, 60). Fox quotes with approval John Livingstone's statement: "When I say that the

fate of the sea turtle or the tiger or the gibbon is mine, I mean it. All that is in my universe is not merely mine; it is *me*. And I shall defend myself. I shall defend myself not only against overt aggression but also against gratuitous insult" (Fox 1986, 60).

Deep ecology does not question the structures of rational egoism and continues to subscribe to two of the main tenets of the egoist framework—that human nature is egoistic and that the alternative to egoism is self-sacrifice.¹² Given these assumptions about egoism, the obvious way to obtain some sort of human interest in defending nature is through the expanded Self operating in the interests of nature but also along the familiar lines of self-interest.¹³ The expanded-self strategy might initially seem to be just another pretentious and obscure way of saying that humans empathize with nature. But the strategy of transferring the structures of egoism is highly problematic, for the widening of interest is obtained at the expense of failing to recognise unambiguously the distinctness and independence of the other.¹⁴ Others are recognized morally only to the extent that they are incorporated into the self, and their difference denied (Warren 1990). And the failure to critique egoism and the disembodied, nonrelational self means a failure to draw connections with other contemporary critiques.

C. THE TRANSCENDED OR TRANSPERSONAL SELF

To the extent that the expanded Self requires that we detach from the particular concerns of the self (a relinquishment that despite its natural difficulty we should struggle to attain), expansion of self to Self also tends to lead into the third position, the transcendence or overcoming of self. Thus Fox urges us to strive for *impartial* identification with *all* particulars, the cosmos, discarding our identifications with our own particular concerns, personal emotions, and attachments (Fox 1990, 12). Fox presents here the deep ecology version of universalization, with the familiar emphasis on the personal and the particular as corrupting and self-interested—"the cause of possessiveness, war and ecological destruction" (1990, 12).

This treatment of particularity, the devaluation of an identity tied to particular parts of the natural world as opposed to an abstractly conceived whole, the cosmos, reflects the rationalistic preoccupation with the universal and its account of ethical life as oppositional to the particular. The analogy in human terms of impersonal love of the cosmos is the view of morality as based on universal principles or the impersonal and abstract "love of man." Thus Fox (1990, 12) reiterates (as if it were unproblematic) the view of particular attachments as ethically suspect and as oppositional to genuine, impartial "identification," which necessarily falls short with all particulars.

Because this "transpersonal" identification is so indiscriminate and intent on denying particular meanings, it cannot allow for the deep and highly

particularistic attachment to place that has motivated both the passion of many modern conservationists and the love of many indigenous peoples for their land (which deep ecology inconsistently tries to treat as a model). This is based not on a vague, bloodless, and abstract cosmological concern but on the formation of identity, social and personal, in relation to particular areas of land, yielding ties often as special and powerful as those to kin, and which are equally expressed in very specific and local responsibilities of care.¹⁵ This emerges clearly in the statements of many indigenous peoples, such as in the moving words of Cecilia Blacktooth explaining why her people would not surrender their land:

You ask us to think what place we like next best to this place where we always lived. You see the graveyard there? There are our fathers and our grandfathers. You see that Eagle-nest mountain and that Rabbit-hole mountain? When God made them, He gave us this place. We have always been here. We do not care for any other place. . . . We have always lived here. We would rather die here. Our fathers did. We cannot leave them. Our children were born here—how can we go away? If you give us the best place in the world, it is not so good as this. . . . This is our home. . . . We cannot live any where else. We were born here and our fathers are buried here. . . . We want this place and no other. . . . (McLuhan 1979, 28)

In inferiorizing such particular, emotional, and kinship-based attachments, deep ecology gives us another variant on the superiority of reason and the inferiority of its contrasts, failing to grasp yet again the role of reason and incompletely critiquing its influence. To obtain a more adequate account than that offered by mainstream ethics and deep ecology it seems that we must move toward the sort of ethics feminist theory has suggested, which can allow for both continuity and difference and for ties to nature which are expressive of the rich, caring relationships of kinship and friendship rather than increasing abstraction and detachment from relationship.¹⁶

V. THE PROBLEM IN TERMS OF THE CRITIQUE OF RATIONALISM

I now show how the problem of the inferiorization of nature appears if it is viewed from the perspective of the critique of rationalism and seen as part of the general problem of revaluing and reintegrating what rationalist culture has split apart, denied, and devalued. Such an account shifts the focus away from the preoccupations of both mainstream ethical approaches and deep ecology, and although it does retain an emphasis on the account of the self as central, it gives a different account from that offered by deep ecology. In section VI. I conclude by arguing that one of the effects of this shift in focus is to make connections with

other critiques, especially feminism, central rather than peripheral or accidental, as they are currently viewed by deep ecologists in particular.

First, what is missing from the accounts of both the ethical philosophers and the deep ecologists is an understanding of the problem of discontinuity as created by a dualism linked to a network of related dualisms. Here I believe a good deal can be learned from the critique of dualism feminist philosophy has developed and from the understanding of the mechanisms of dualisms ecofeminists have produced. A dualistically construed dichotomy typically polarizes difference and minimizes shared characteristics, construes difference along lines of superiority/inferiority, and views the inferior side as a means to the higher ends of the superior side (the instrumental thesis). Because its nature is defined oppositionally, the task of the superior side, that in which it realizes itself and expresses its true nature, is to separate from, dominate, and control the lower side. This has happened both with the human/nature division and with other related dualisms such as masculine/feminine, reason/body, and reason/emotion. Challenging these dualisms involves not just a reevaluation of superiority/inferiority and a higher status for the underside of the dualisms (in this case nature) but also a reexamination and reconceptualizing of the dualistically construed categories themselves. So in the case of the human/nature dualism it is not just a question of improving the status of nature, moral or otherwise, while everything else remains the same, but of reexamining and reconceptualizing the concept of the human, and also the concept of the contrasting class of nature. For the concept of the human, of what it is to be fully and authentically human, and of what is genuinely human in the set of characteristics typical humans possess, has been defined oppositionally, by exclusion of what is associated with the inferior natural sphere in very much the way that Lloyd (1983), for example, has shown in the case of the categories of masculine and feminine, and of reason and its contrasts. Humans have both biological and mental characteristics, but the mental rather than the biological have been taken to be characteristic of the human and to give what is "fully and authentically" human. The term "human" is, of course, not merely descriptive here but very much an evaluative term setting out an ideal: it is what is essential or worthwhile in the human that excludes the natural. It is not necessarily denied that humans have some material or animal component—rather, it is seen in this framework as alien or inessential to them, not part of their fully or truly human nature. The human essence is often seen as lying in maximizing control over the natural sphere (both within and without) and in qualities such as rationality, freedom, and transcendence of the material sphere. These qualities are also identified as masculine, and hence the *oppositional* model of the human coincides or converges with a masculine model, in which the characteristics attributed are those of the masculine ideal.

Part of a strategy for challenging this human/nature dualism, then, would involve recognition of these excluded qualities—split off, denied, or construed

as alien, or comprehended as the sphere of supposedly *inferior* humans such as women and blacks—as equally and fully human. This would provide a basis for the recognition of *continuities* with the natural world. Thus reproductivity, sensuality, emotionality would be taken to be as fully and authentically human qualities as the capacity for abstract planning and calculation. This proceeds from the assumption that one basis for discontinuity and alienation from nature is alienation from those qualities which provide continuity with nature in ourselves.

This connection between the rationalist account of nature within and nature without has powerful repercussions. So part of what is involved is a challenge to the centrality and dominance of the rational in the account of the human self. Such a challenge would have far-reaching implications for what is valuable in human society and culture, and it connects with the challenge to the cultural legacy of rationalism made by other critiques of rationalism such as feminism, and by critiques of technocracy, bureaucracy, and instrumentalism.

What is involved here is a reconceptualization of the human side of the human/nature dualism, to free it from the legacy of rationalism. Also in need of reconceptualization is the underside of this dualism, the concept of nature, which is construed in polarized terms as bereft of qualities appropriated to the human side, as passive and lacking in agency and teleology, as pure materiality, pure body, or pure mechanism. So what is called for here is the development of alternatives to mechanistic ways of viewing the world, which are also part of the legacy of rationalism.

VI. INSTRUMENTALISM AND THE SELF

There are two parts to the restructuring of the human self in relation to nature—reconceptualizing the human and reconceptualizing the self, and especially its possibilities of relating to nature in other than instrumental ways. Here the critique of the egoistic self of liberal individualism by both feminist and social philosophers, as well as the critique of instrumental reason, offers a rich set of connections and insights on which to draw. In the case of both of these parts what is involved is the rejection of basically masculine models, that is, of humanity and of the self.

Instrumentalism has been identified as a major problem by the ethical approach in environmental philosophy but treated in a rather impoverished way, as simply the problem of establishing the inherent worth of nature.¹⁷ Connection has not been made to the broader account that draws on the critique of instrumental reason. This broader account reveals both its links with the discontinuity problem and its connection with the account of the self. A closer look at this further critique gives an indication of how we might

Val Plumwood

19

develop an account that enables us to stress continuity without drowning in a sea of indistinguishability.

We might notice first the strong connections between discontinuity (the polarization condition of dualism) and instrumentalism—the view that the excluded sphere is appropriately treated as a means to the ends of the higher sphere or group, that its value lies in its usefulness to the privileged group that is, in contrast, worthwhile or significant in itself. Second, it is important to maintain a strong distinction and maximize distance between the sphere of means and that of ends to avoid breaking down the sharp boundaries required by hierarchy. Third, it helps if the sphere treated instrumentally is seen as lacking ends of its own (as in views of nature and women as passive), for then others can be imposed upon it without problem. There are also major connections that come through the account of the self which accompanies both views.

The self that complements the instrumental treatment of the other is one that stresses sharply defined ego boundaries, distinctness, autonomy, and separation from others—that is defined *against* others, and lacks essential connections to them. This corresponds to object/relation account of the masculine self associated with the work of Nancy Chodorow (1979, 1985) and also to the self-interested individual presupposed in market theory (Poole 1985, 1990).¹⁸ This self uses both other humans and the world generally as a means to its egoistic satisfaction, which is assumed to be the satisfaction of interests in which others play no essential role. If we try to specify these interests they would make no essential reference to the welfare of others, except to the extent that these are useful to serve predetermined ends. Others as means are interchangeable if they produce equivalent satisfactions—anything which conduces to that end is as valuable, other things being equal, as anything else which equally conduces to that end. The interests of such an individual, that of the individual of market theory and of the masculine self as theorized by Chodorow, are defined as essentially independent of or disconnected from those of other people, and his or her transactions with the world at large consist of various attempts to get satisfaction for these predetermined private interests. Others are a “resource,” and the interests of others connect with the interests of such autonomous selves only accidentally or contingently. They are not valued for themselves but for their effects in producing gratification. This kind of instrumental picture, so obviously a misdescription in the case of relations to other humans, is precisely still the normal Western model of what our relations to nature should be.

Now this kind of instrumental, disembedded account of the relation of self to others has been extensively criticized in the area of political theory from a variety of quarters, including feminist theory, in the critique of liberalism, and in environmental philosophy (Benhabib 1987; Benhabib and Cornell 1987; Benjamin 1985; Chodorow 1985; Gilligan 1982, 1987; Grimshaw 1986; Jagger 1983; Miller 1978; Plumwood 1980; Poole 1984, 1985, 1990; Warren 1990).

It has been objected that this account does not give an accurate picture of the human self—that humans are social and connected in a way such an account does not recognize. People do have interests that make *essential* and not merely accidental or contingent reference to those of others, for example, when a mother wishes for her child's recovery, the child's flourishing is an essential *part* of her flourishing, and similarly with close others and indeed for others more widely ("social others"). But, the objection continues, this gives a misleading picture of the world, one that omits or impoverishes a whole significant dimension of human experience, a dimension which provides important insight into gender difference, without which we cannot give an adequate picture of what it is to be human. Instead we must see human beings and their interests as *essentially* related and interdependent. As Karen Warren notes "Relationships are not something extrinsic to who we are, not an 'add on' feature of human nature; they play an essential role in shaping what it is to be human" (Warren 1990,143). That people's interests are relational does not imply a holistic view of them—that they are merged or indistinguishable. Although some of the mother's interests entail satisfaction of the child's interests, they are not identical or even necessarily similar. There is overlap, but the relation is one of intentional inclusion (her interest is *that* the child should thrive, that certain of the child's key interests are satisfied) rather than accidental overlap.

This view of self-in-relationship is, I think, a good candidate for the richer account of self deep ecologists have sought and for which they have mistaken holistic accounts. It is an account that avoids atomism but that enables a recognition of interdependence and relationship without falling into the problems of indistinguishability, that acknowledges both continuity and difference, and that breaks the culturally posed false dichotomy of egoism and altruism of interests;¹⁹ it bypasses both masculine "separation" and traditional-feminine "merger" accounts of the self. It can also provide an appropriate foundation for an ethic of connectedness and caring for others, as argued by Gilligan (1982, 1987) and Miller (1978).

Thus it is unnecessary to adopt any of the stratagems of deep ecology—the indistinguishable self, the expanded self, or the transpersonal self—in order to provide an alternative to anthropocentrism or human self-interest. This can be better done through the relational account of self, which clearly recognizes the distinctness of nature but also our relationship and continuity with it. On this relational account, respect for the other results neither from the containment of self nor from a transcendence of self, but is an *expression* of self in relationship, not egoistic self as merged with the other but self as embedded in a network of essential relationships with distinct others.

The relational account of self can usefully be applied to the case of human relations with nature and to place. The standard Western view of the relation of the self to the nonhuman is that it is always *accidentally* related, and hence

the nonhuman can be used as a means to the self-contained ends of human beings. Pieces of land are real estate, readily interchangeable as equivalent means to the end of human satisfaction; no place is more than "a stage along life's way, a launching pad for higher flights and wider orbits than your own" (Berman 1982, 327). But, of course, we do not all think this way, and instances of contrary behavior would no doubt be more common if their possibility were not denied and distorted by both theoretical and social construction. But other cultures have recognized such essential connection of self to country clearly enough, and many indigenous voices from the past and present speak of the grief and pain in loss of their land, to which they are as essentially connected as to any human other. When Aboriginal people, for example, speak of the land as part of them, "like brother and mother" (Neidjie 1985, 51; 1989, 4, 146), this is, I think, one of their meanings. If instrumentalism is impoverishing and distorting as an account of our relations to other human beings, it is equally so as a guiding principle in our relations to nature and to place.²⁰

But to show that the self can be essentially related to nature is by no means to show that it normally would be, especially in modern Western culture. What is culturally viewed as alien and inferior, as not worthy of respect or respectful knowledge, is not something to which such essential connection can easily be made. Here the three parts of the problem—the conception of the human, the conception of the self, and the conception of nature—connect again. And normally such essential relation would involve particularity, through connection to and friendship for *particular* places, forests, animals, to which one is particularly strongly related or attached and toward which one has specific and meaningful, not merely abstract, responsibilities of care.

One of the effects of viewing the problem as arising especially in the context of rationalism is to provide a rich set of connections with other critiques; it makes the connection between the critique of anthropocentrism and various other critiques that also engage critically with rationalism, such as feminism and critical theory, much more important—indeed essential—to the understanding of each. The problem of the Western account of the human/nature relation is seen in the context of the other related sets of dualisms; they are linked through their definitions as the underside of the various contrasts of reason. Since much of the strength and persistence of these dualisms derives from their connections and their ability to mirror, confirm, and support one another, critiques of anthropocentrism that fail to take account of these connections have missed an essential and not merely additional feature.

Anthropocentrism and androcentrism in particular are linked by the rationalist conception of the human self as masculine and by the account of authentically human characteristics as centered around rationality and the exclusion of its contrasts (especially characteristics regarded as feminine, animal, or natural) as less human. This provides a different and richer account of the notion of anthropocentrism, now conceived by deep ecology (Fox 1990).

5) in terms of the notion of equality, which is both excessively narrow and difficult to articulate in any precise or convincing way in a context where needs are so different. The perception of the connection as at best accidental is a feature of some recent critiques of ecofeminism, for example the discussion of Fox (1990) and Eckersley (1989) on the relation of feminism and environmental philosophy. Fox misses entirely the main thrust of the ecofeminist account of environmental philosophy and the critique of deep ecology which results or which is advanced in the ecofeminist literature, which is that it has failed to observe the way in which anthropocentrism and androcentrism are linked.²¹ It is a consequence of my arguments here that this critique needs broadening—deep ecology has failed to observe (and often even goes out of its way to deny) connections with a number of other critiques, not just feminism, for example, but also socialism, especially in the forms that mount a critique of rationalism and of modernity. The failure to observe such connections is the result of an inadequate historical analysis and understanding of the way in which the inferiorization of both women and nature is grounded in rationalism, and the connections of both to the inferiorizing of the body, hierarchical concepts of labor, and disembedded and individualist accounts of the self.

Instead of addressing the real concerns of ecofeminism in terms of connection, Fox takes ecofeminism as aiming to replace concern with anthropocentrism by concern with androcentrism.²² This would have the effect of making ecofeminism a reductionist position which takes women's oppression as the basic form and attempts to reduce all other forms to it. This position is a straw woman,²³ the effect of ecofeminism is not to absorb or sacrifice the critique of anthropocentrism, but to deepen and enrich it.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper, was read at the Women in Philosophy Conference in Canberra, July, 1989. The author would like to thank Jim Cheney and Karen Warren for comments on an earlier draft.

1. Regan, of course, as part of the animal rights movement, is mainly concerned not with wild animals but with domestic animals as they appear in the context and support of human society and culture, although he does not indicate any qualification in moral treatment. Nevertheless, there may be an important moral boundary here, for natural ecosystems cannot be organized along the lines of justice, fairness and rights, and it would be absurd to try to impose such a social order upon them via intervention in these systems. This does not mean, of course, that humans can do anything in such a situation, just that certain kinds of intervention are not in order. But these kinds of intervention may be in order in the case of human social systems and in the case of animals that have already been brought into these social systems through human intervention, and the concept of rights and of social responsibility may have far more application here. This would mean that the domestic/wild distinction would demarcate an important moral boundary in

terms of duties of intervention, although neither Regan (1986) nor Taylor (1986) comes to grips with this problem. In the case of Taylor's "wild living things" rights seem less important than respect for independence and autonomy, and the prima facie obligation may be nonintervention.

2. If the Kantian universalizing perspective is based on self-containment, its major contemporary alternative, that of John Rawls, is based on a "definitional identity" in which the "other" can be considered to the extent that it is not recognized as truly different, as genuinely other (Benhabib 1987, 165).

3. Contra Cheney, who appears to advocate the abandonment of all general ethical concepts and the adoption of a "contextual" ethics based in pure particularity and emotionality. We do need both to reintegrate the personal and particular and reevaluate more positively its role, but overcoming moral dualism will not simply amount to an affirmation of the personal in the moral sphere. To embrace pure particularity and emotionality is implicitly to accept the dualistic construction of these as oppositional to a rationalist ethics and to attempt to reverse value. In general this reactive response is an inadequate way to deal with such dualisms. And rules themselves, as Grimshaw (1986, 209) points out, are not incompatible with recognition of special relationships and responsibility to particular others. Rules themselves are not the problem, and hence it is not necessary to move to a ruleless ethics; rather it is rules that demand the discarding of the personal, the emotional, and the particular and which aim at self-containment.

4. For example, Bill Neidjie's words "This ground and this earth / like brother and mother" (Neidjie 1985, 46) may be interpreted as an affirmation of such kinship or continuity. (See also Neidjie 1985, 53, 61, 62, 77, 81, 82, 88).

5. The logic of dualism and the masculinity of the concept of humanity are discussed in Plumwood (1986, 1988) and Warren (1987, 1989).

6. Nonetheless, deep ecology's approach to ethics is, like much else, doubtfully consistent, variable and shifting. Thus although Arne Naess (1974, 1984, 1988) calls for recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, he also tends to treat "the maxim of self-realization" as *substituting for* and obviating an ethical account of care and respect for nature (Naess 1988, 20, 86), placing the entire emphasis on phenomenology. In more recent work, however, the emphasis seems to have quietly shifted back again from holistic intuition to a broad and extremely vague "biocentric egalitarianism" which places the center once again in ethics and enjoins an ethic of maximum expansion of Self (Fox 1990).

7. Other critics of deep ecology, such as Sylvan (1985) and Cheney (1987) have also suggested that it shifts between different and incompatible versions. Ecofeminist critics of deep ecology have included Salleh (1984), Kheel (1985), Biehl (1987), and Warren (1990).

8. Arne Naess, quoted in Fox (1982, 3, 10).

9. This is argued in Plumwood (1980), where a relational account of self developed in the context of an anarchist theory is applied to relations with nature. Part of the problem lies in the terminology of "holism" itself, which is used in highly variable and ambiguous ways, sometimes carrying commitment to indistinguishability and sometimes meaning only "nonatomistic."

10. Arne Naess, quoted in Fox (1986, 54).

11. As noted by Cheney (1989, 293-325).

12. Thus John Seed says: "Naess wrote that when most people think about conservation, they think about sacrifice. This is a treacherous basis for conservation, because most people aren't capable of working for anything except their own self-interest. . . . Naess

argued that we need to find ways to extend our identity into nature. Once that happens, being out in front of bulldozers or whatever becomes no more of a sacrifice than moving your foot if you notice that someone's just about to strike it with an axe" (Seed 1989).

13. This denial of the alterity of the other is also the route taken by J. Baird Callicott, who indeed asserts that "The principle of axiological complementarity posits an essential unity between self and world and establishes the problematic intrinsic value of nature in relation to the axiologically privileged value of self" (1985, 275). Given the impoverishment of Humean theory in the area of relations (and hence its inability to conceive a self-in-relationship whose connections to others are not merely contingent but essential), Callicott has little alternative to this direction of development.

14. Grimshaw (1986, 182). See also the excellent discussion in Warren (1990, 136-38) of the importance of recognition and respect for the other's difference; Blum (1980, 75); and Benhabib (1987, 166).

15. This traditional model of land relationship is closely linked to that of bioregionalism, whose strategy is to engage people in greater knowledge and care for the local areas that have meaning for them and where they can most easily evolve a caring and responsible life-style. The feat of "impartial identification with all particulars" is, beyond the seeking of individual enlightenment, strategically empty. Because it cares "impartially" for everything it can, in practice, care for nothing.

16. Thus some ecofeminists, such as Cheney (1987, 1989) and Warren (1990), have been led to the development of alternative accounts of ethics and ethical theory building and the development of distinctively ecofeminist ethics.

17. Although the emphasis of early work in this area (for example, Plumwood 1975) was mainly directed toward showing that a respectful, noninstrumental view of nature was logically viable since that was widely disputed, it is certainly well past time to move beyond that. Although there is now wider support for a respectful, noninstrumental position, it remains controversial; see, for example, Thompson (1990) and Plumwood (1991).

18. Poole (1984) has also shown how this kind of self is presupposed in the Kantian moral picture, where desire or inclination is essentially self-directed and is held in check by reason (acting in the interests of universality).

19. In the sense of altruism in which one's own interests are neglected in favor of another's, essentially relational interests are neither egoistic nor altruistic.

20. On rationalism and place see Edward Relph (1976, 1981).

21. Fox (1990, 12), in claiming gender neutrality for cosmologically based identification and treating issues of gender as irrelevant to the issue, ignores the historical scholarship linking conceptions of gender and conceptions of morality via the division between public and private spheres (for example, Lloyd [1984] and Nicholson [1983]). To the extent that the ecofeminist thesis is not an essentialist one linking sex to emotionality and particularity or to nature but one linking social and historical conceptions of gender to conceptions of morality and rationality, it is not refuted by examples of women who buy a universalizing view or who drive bulldozers, or by Mrs. Thatcher. Fox's argument here involves a sex/gender confusion. On the sex/gender distinction see Plumwood (1989, 2-11).

22. Thus Fox (1990) throughout his discussion, like Zimmerman (1987, 37), takes "the ecofeminist charge against deep ecology" to be that "androcentrism is 'the real root' of ecological destruction" (1990, 14), so that "there is no need to worry about any form of human domination other than androcentrism" (1990, 18). Warren (1990, 144) telling-

ly discusses Fox's claim that "feminist" is redundant as an addition to a deep ecological ethic.

23. This reductionist position has a few representatives in the literature (perhaps Andrée Collard [1988], and Sally Miller Gearhart [1982]), but cannot be taken as representative of the main body of ecofeminist work. Fox, I believe, is right to resist such a reduction and to insist on the noneliminability of the form of oppression the critique of anthropocentrism is concerned with, but the conclusion that the critiques are unrelated does not follow. Critiques and the different kinds of oppression they correspond to can be distinguishable but, like individuals themselves, still related in essential and not merely accidental ways. The choice between merger (reductive elimination) and disconnection (isolation) of critiques is the same false dichotomy that inspires the false contrasts of holism and atomism, and of self as merged, lacking boundaries, versus self as isolated atom, lacking essential connection to others.

REFERENCES

- Benhabib, Seyla. 1987. The generalised and the concrete other. In *Women and moral theory*, 154-77. E. Kittay and D. Meyers, eds. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allenheld.
- Benhabib, Seyla and Drucilla Cornell, eds. 1987. *Feminism as critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Benjamin, Jessica. 1985. The bonds of love: Rational violence and erotic domination. In *The future of difference*. H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine, eds. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Berman, Marshall. 1982. *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity*. New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Penguin.
- Biehl, Janet. 1987. It's deep, but is it broad? An ecofeminist looks at deep ecology. *Kick It Over* special supplement (Winter).
- Blum, Lawrence A. 1980. *Friendship, altruism and morality*. Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Callicott, J. Baird. 1985. Intrinsic value, quantum theory, and environmental ethics. *Environmental Ethics* 7: 261-62.
- Cheney, Jim. 1987. Ecofeminism and deep ecology. *Environmental Ethics* 9: 115-145.
- . 1989. The neo-stoicism of radical environmentalism. *Environmental Ethics* 11: 293-325.
- Chodorow, Nancy. 1979. *The reproduction of mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1985. Gender, relation and difference in psychoanalytic perspective. In *The future of difference*, 3-19. H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine, eds. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Collard, Andrée. 1988. *Rape of the wild: Man's violence against animals and the earth*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; London: The Woman's Press.
- Cook, Francis. 1977. *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The jewel net of Indra*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. 118-119.
- Eckersley, Robyn. 1989. Divining evolution: The ecological ethics of Murray Bookchin. *Environmental Ethics* 11: 99-116.

- Fox, Warwick. 1982. The intuition of deep ecology. Paper presented at Environment, Ethics and Ecology Conference, Canberra. Also published under the title Deep ecology: A new philosophy of our time? *The Ecologist* 14 (1984): 194-200.
- . 1986. Approaching deep ecology: A response to Richard Sylvan's critique of deep ecology. Environmental Studies Occasional Paper 20. Hobart: University of Tasmania Centre for Environmental Studies.
- . 1989. The deep ecology-ecofeminism debate and its parallels. *Environmental Ethics* 11 : 5-25.
- . 1990. *Towards a transpersonal ecology: Developing new foundations for environmentalism*. Boston: Shambala.
- Gearhart, Sally Miller. 1982. The Future—if there is one—is female. In *Reweaving the web of life*, 266-285. P. McAllister, ed. Philadelphia and Santa Cruz: New Society Publishers.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a different voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . 1987. Moral orientation and moral development. In *Women and moral theory*, 19-33. E. Kittay and D. Meyers, eds. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allenheld.
- Griffin, Susan. 1978. *Woman and nature: The roaring inside her*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Grimshaw, Jean. 1986. *Philosophy and feminist thinking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Also published as *Feminist philosophers*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf.
- Griscom, Joan L. 1981. On healing the nature/history split in feminist thought. *Heresies* 4(1): 4-9.
- Jaggar, Alison. 1983. *Feminist politics and human nature*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allenheld; Brighton: Harvester.
- Kheel, Marti. 1985. The liberation of nature: A circular affair. *Environmental Ethics* 7: 135-49.
- King, Ynestra. 1981. Feminism and revolt. *Heresies* 4(1): 12-16.
- . 1989. The ecology of feminism and the feminism of ecology. In *Healing the wounds*. J. Plant, ed., Philadelphia and Santa Cruz: New Society Publishers.
- Leopold, Aldo. 1949. *A sand county almanac*, 201-2. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. 1983a. Public reason and private passion. *Metaphilosophy* 14: 308-26.
- . 1983b. Reason, gender and morality in the history of philosophy. *Social Research* 50(3): 490-513.
- . 1984. *The man of reason*. London: Methuen.
- McLuhan T. C., ed. 1973. *Touch the earth*. London: Abacus.
- Miller, Jean Baker. 1976, 1978. *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston: Beacon Press; London: Pelican.
- Midgley, Mary. 1983. *Animals and why they matter*. Athens: University of Georgia Press; London: Penguin.
- Naess, Arne. 1973. The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement: A summary. *Inquiry* 16: 95-100.
- . 1986. Intrinsic value: Will the defenders of nature please rise. In *Conservation Biology*. M. Soule, ed. Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates.
- . 1988. *Ecology, community and lifestyle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Neidjie, Bill. 1985. *Kakadu man*. With S. Davis and A. Fox. Canberra: Mybrood P/L.
- Neidjie, Bill and Keith Taylor, eds. 1989. *Story about feeling*. Wyndham: Magabala Books.
- Nicholson, Linda J. 1983. Women, morality and history. *Social Research* 50(3): 514-36.

- Plumwood, Val. 1975. Critical notice of Passmore's *Man's responsibility for nature*. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 53(2): 171-85.
- . 1980. Social theories, self-management and environmental problems. In *Environmental Philosophy*, 217-332. D. Mannison, M. McRobbie, and R. Routley eds. Canberra: ANU Department of Philosophy Monograph Series R555.
- . 1986. Ecofeminism: an overview and discussion of positions and arguments. In *Women and philosophy*, Supplement to vol. 64 *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (June 1986): 120-38.
- . 1988, 1990. Women, humanity and nature. *Radical Philosophy* 48: 6-24. Reprinted in *Feminism, socialism and philosophy: a radical philosophy reader*. S. Sayers, ed. London: Routledge.
- . 1989. Do we need a sex/gender distinction? *Radical Philosophy* 51: 2-11.
- . 1990. Plato and the bush. *Meanyin* 49(3): 524-36.
- . 1991. Ethics and instrumentalism: A Response to Janna Thompson. *Environmental Ethics*. Forthcoming.
- Poole, Ross. 1984. Reason, self-interest and "commercial society": The social content of Kantian morality. *Critical Philosophy* 1: 24-46.
- . 1985. Morality, masculinity and the market. *Radical Philosophy* 39: 16-23.
- . 1990. Modernity, rationality and "the masculine." In *Femininity/Masculinity and representation*. T. Threadgold and A. Cranny-Francis, eds. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1990.
- Regan, Tom. 1986. *The case for animal rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Relph, Edward. 1976. *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion.
- . 1981. *Rational landscapes and humanistic geography*. London: Croom Helm.
- Rodman, John. 1980. Paradigm change in political science. *American Behavioural Scientist* 24(1): 54-55.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1975. *New woman new earth*. Minneapolis: Seabury Press.
- Salleh, Ariel. 1984. deeper than deep ecology. *Environmental Ethics* 6: 339-45.
- Seed, John. 1989. Interviewed by Pat Stone. *Mother Earth News* (May/June).
- Seed, John, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming, and Arne Naess. 1988. *Thinking like a mountain: Towards a council of all beings*. Philadelphia and Santa Cruz: New Society Publishers.
- Sylvan, Richard. 1985. A critique of deep ecology. *Radical Philosophy* 40 and 41.
- Taylor, Paul. 1986. *Respect for nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Thomas Aquinas. 1976. *Summa contra Gentiles*. Bk. 3, Pt. 2, chap. 62. Quoted in *Animal rights and human obligations*, 56. T. Regan and P. Singer, eds. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Thompson, Janna. 1990. A refutation of environmental ethics. *Environmental Ethics* 12(2): 147-60.
- Warren, Karen J. 1987. Feminism and ecology: Making connections. *Environmental Ethics* 9: 17-18.
- . 1990. The power and promise of ecological feminism. *Environmental Ethics* 12(2): 121-46.
- Zimmerman, Michael E. 1987. Feminism, deep ecology, and environmental ethics. *Environmental Ethics* 9.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Beasts Versus the Biosphere?

MARY MIDGLEY

ABSTRACT: Apparent clashes of interest between 'deep ecologists' and 'animal liberationists' can be understood as differences in emphasis rather than conflicts of principle, although it is only too easy for campaigners to regard as rivals good causes other than their own. Moral principles are part of a larger whole, within which they can be related, rather than absolute all-purpose rules of right conduct. This is illustrated using the practical dilemma which often occurs in conservation management, of whether or not to cull animals that are damaging their habitat by overgrazing. Here, and in general, when we are faced with a choice between two evils, the need for scrupulous discrimination and honesty cannot be overstated; but it is not a worthy option to retreat behind moral principles of limited application.

KEYWORDS: Culling, habitat management, moral dilemmas, moral judgement

THE ISSUE

Is there a necessary clash between concern for animals and concern for the environment as a whole?

Twenty years back, when both these causes first became prominent, they were often seen as clashing. Extreme 'deep ecologists' tended then to emphasize the value of the whole so exclusively as to reject all concern for the interest of its parts, and especially for the interests of individuals.¹ This went for individual animals as well as humans. On the other side, extreme 'animal liberationists', for their part, were busy extending the very demanding current conception of individual human rights to cover individual animals.² That did seem to mean that animal claims – indeed, the claim of any single animal – must always prevail over every other claim, however strong, including claims from the environment. Each party tended to see only its own central ideal, and to look on the other's concern as a perverse distraction from it.

RECONCILING FACTORS

Since then there has been considerable reconciliation. This has partly flowed from mere practical common-sense. People have begun to notice how much, in practice, the two causes converge, because animals and plants always need each other. The whole environment cannot be served except through its parts, and animals form an essential part of every ecosystem. The huge majority of animals still live in the wild, where their chance of surviving at all depends on the plants, rivers etc. around them. (Only a few species, such as rats and herring-gulls, can do well by exploiting resources provided by humans). Equally, plants and rivers commonly need many of their accustomed animals. Obvious examples are pollinating insects and birds, beavers to maintain swamps, scavengers to recycle waste, and insectivorous creatures, from anteaters to frogs, to keep insect populations from overeating the vegetation. The bad effects of removing such animals have been repeatedly seen. Even with captive animals, too, large-scale ill-treatment inevitably does have bad environmental effects. It is not just an accident that factory-farming produces appalling pollution. It is bound to do so, because proper treatment of waste would cost too much to allow the cheapness which is its main aim.

Thus the two causes do overlap widely. Naturally, however, both have also parts which still remain separate. Concern for the whole environment gives no direct motive to oppose bull-fighting, nor does humane concern for bulls directly forbid the proliferation of cars. These are distinct campaigns. Even if they seem closely connected and are often pursued by the same people, they differ widely in emphasis. But that kind of difference does not make all-out conflict necessary.

It is not surprising that there was real disappointment among the early crusaders at finding that those whom they had welcomed as allies were not complete soul-mates, only helpers for some of their aims. In all serious campaigning, once general talk needs to be cashed in action, this kind of bond-breaking disillusionment crops up and makes real difficulties. The sense of unity with one's allies is a powerful support in the hard work of politicking, and when differences appear, they always seem to threaten that support. If, however, we want to keep the legitimate element in that support, we must clear our minds about what kind of unity we need and can expect. Learning to do this is a central mark that a campaign has become serious.

There are, of course, also some exceptions to this general convergence of the two causes, some cases of real conflict. They are important, and we must look at them carefully in a moment. But in general, at the pragmatic level, there really is convergence, and in spite of the endemic tendency to pick quarrels where possible, the rivalry has come to look much less fierce than it did. The gradual perception of this convergence has paralleled the still more necessary shift by which people are, at last, also beginning to realize that human welfare, too, converges very considerably both with the interests of the biosphere and with

BEASTS VERSUS THE BIOSPHERE?

115

those of other animals. The public, if not yet its governments, is coming to realize that the biosphere is not a luxury, a theme park to be visited on Saturday afternoons, but something necessary for human survival. However hesitantly, that public is starting to understand that no environment means no people, and that a dismal, distorted environment means dismal, distorted people.

The public is also coming to suspect, far more sharply than it used to, that brutal and uncontrolled exploitation of animals cannot be compatible with true human welfare. People are growing more critical than their forebears were about some of the human purposes for which animals are exploited, purposes such as cruel sports, or wearing fur coats, or enlarged drug use, or constantly eating meat. They are more ready now to think that these things are less essential to human welfare than they used to suppose, and that having a clear conscience about cruelty may be more essential to it.

I do not mean that this new sensibility is yet translated into effective action. It is not. By a grim historical accident, the huge new technologies by which industries now exploit animals were established before this sensibility arose, and are now protected by solid vested interests. There is however a real moral shift towards disapproval of them, a shift which has made it harder for these vested interests to defend their habits directly, forcing them to rely much more on secrecy or straightforward lying.

The idea that the aims of life must somehow embrace the welfare of all life, not that of humans only, is gaining ground. The special qualities that make humanity worth preserving are now seen, much more than they used to be, as involving care for the rest of the planet, not only for ourselves. Vague though this sense may be, it does supply a context within which the claims of the animate and inanimate creation can in principle be brought into some kind of relation, instead of being perceived as locked in a meaningless, incurable clash. This idea still needs much clearer expression, but it is plainly growing.

THE TROUBLE WITH FANATICISM

At the pragmatic level, then, the competition looks noticeably less fierce than it did. But of course we want more than that. We need to think out the principles involved. We would need to do that anyway, in order to clear our own thoughts, even if the rough convergence we have did not leave plenty of specific conflicts outstanding. But we need it all the more as things are, because, in the initial stage of unbridled conflict, both sides seemed to be suggesting that there really was no moral problem involved at all. Each party was inclined to see its own moral principle as unquestionably supreme. Each found the other's stand an irrelevance, a perverse trivialization, a distraction from what was obviously the only point morally relevant.

This is fanaticism. Fanatics are not just stern moralists, they are obsessive

ones who forget all but one part of the moral scene. They see no need to respect ideals which seem to conflict with their chosen ones, or to work out a reconciliation between them. This frame of mind is not, of course, peculiar to full-time fanatics. It is easy to fall into it whenever one is, for the moment, completely absorbed in some good cause, and good causes often do seem to demand that kind of absorption.

Nobody, however, can afford to get stuck with this way of thinking. Moral principles have to be seen as part of a larger whole, within which, when they conflict, they can in principle somehow be related. The impression that a simple, one-sided morality is in itself nobler than a complex one is mistaken. The issue we are now considering shows this. Any sane and workable approach to life has to contain *both* an attitude to individuals *and* an attitude to larger wholes.³ Neither of them is reducible to the other. It is always possible for the two to conflict, but it is always necessary to try to bring them into harmony.

THE PARADOX OF 'PLURALISM'

Attempts by moral philosophers in the last few decades to find some single 'moral theory' such as Utilitarianism, which can organize the whole moral scene, have been misguided. They ignore the complexity of life. Of course we do need to relate our different moral insights as well as possible, and to work continually at bringing them into harmony. But our aims are complex. We are not machines designed for a single purpose, we are many-sided creatures with a full life to live. The ambition of finding a single underlying rationale for all our aims is vacuous. (Maybe God can see one, but certainly we cannot). Yet we do indeed need to integrate our aims as far as possible. This difficult two-sided enterprise is now being further obscured by one more irrelevant distortion from academics pugnaciously attacking or defending 'pluralism'. We ought to be through with this kind of thing. We should be asking "what is pluralism?" or "what kinds of it are necessary?", not wasting energy on yet one more polarized squabble.

The reductive, unifying ambition has, however, haunted many great philosophers from Plato's time on, and it was particularly strong in the founders of Utilitarianism, especially in Jeremy Bentham. As a controversial weapon, the idea that all valid morality can be 'reduced' to one's own favoured principle, so that anything not so reducible can be discredited, has enormous appeal. But again and again its crudity has become obvious. Utilitarianism, like other moral insights, was a light cast on a certain range of problems, not a final, comprehensive revelation for all choices. Accordingly, recent attempts to reduce moral philosophy to a tribal warfare between Utilitarians and 'Kantians' or 'rights theorists' is a shallow and futile evasion of its real problems – a point which both Kant and Mill in their better moments already saw very clearly, though Bentham perhaps did not.

BEASTS VERSUS THE BIOSPHERE?

117

What great philosophers do for us is not to hand out such an all-purpose system. It is to light up and clarify some special aspect of life, to supply conceptual tools which will do a certain necessary kind of work. Wide though that area of work may be, it is never the whole, and all ideas lose their proper power when they are used out of their appropriate context. That is why one great philosopher does not necessarily displace another, why there is room for all of them and a great many more whom we do not have yet.

Because our aims are not simple, we are forced somehow to reconcile many complementary principles and duties. This reconciliation, hard enough in our own lives, is doubly hard in public work, where people devoted to different ideals have to co-operate. This calls on them, not just to tolerate each other's attitudes, but to respect and understand them. Fanatical refusal to do this is not just a practical nuisance; it is a sin. But it is so tempting that it is endemic in all campaigning, and we are not likely ever to get rid of it.

It was not, then, surprising that, in the seventies, both deep ecologists and animal liberationists should have been slow to see this need. Both causes were indeed of the first importance, and both had previously been disgracefully neglected. In this situation, tunnel vision and mutual incomprehension are normal reactions. Since that time, however, as we have grown more familiar with both causes, there has been increasing realization that they can and must in principle somehow be brought together. Concern for the whole and concern for individuals are simply not alternatives. They are complementary, and indeed inseparable, aspects of a decent moral problem.

Neither moral integrity nor logical consistency forces us to choose between general ideals of this kind. When they clash on particular issues, they do so in the same way as other moral considerations which we already know we have to reconcile somehow. We are familiar with such clashes between other important ideals – between justice and mercy for example, or between all our duties to others and the duties of our own development. There is no clear, reductive way of settling who wins this kind of contest. We know that in these cases we can face a real choice of evils, and we then have to find some way of deciding which of these evils is, in this particular case, the worse.

PRACTICAL DILEMMAS

As far as general principles go, then, the issue between animals and the rest of the biosphere has grown easier to handle in the last twenty years. Co-operation has become more natural to us, friction less habitual, and that is an undoubted gain for campaigning purposes. But of course it is not the end of our troubles. There is still a great deal of detailed work to be done on genuine, specific clashes of interest. Some of these occur within one of the two causes – between two rival ways of protecting the vegetation, or between the interests of two kinds of

animals. But naturally, some also occur at the border, between vegetables and animals. Indeed there are plenty of these, and we are not likely to get rid of them.

Consider a very common and pressing kind of example. What should happen when a population of herbivores – deer, elephants, rabbits, monkeys, feral goats, New Zealand possums or whatever – begins to damage its habitat seriously by overgrazing? Very often, of course, this trouble has been caused by earlier human actions. People have encroached on the habitat, or have removed predators, or have introduced the herbivores in the first place. But knowing that they shouldn't have done this does not necessarily help us, because these past actions often cannot be undone. We cannot now take the rabbits out of Australia. We need to think what to do next. In cases where – after considering all alternatives – culling seems to be the only practicable means of saving the vegetation, is it legitimate? Or ought we to ban all killing?

It is essential not to treat a problem like this as an arbitrary dilemma, a blank, unintelligible clash between unrelated moral principles, each espoused by a different tribe, an issue to be settled by tribal combat between exploiters and humanitarians. Both the values involved here are recognizable to all of us. There is a real choice of evils. To leave a habitat to degenerate is to injure all its animals – including the species concerned. It may be to destroy them all. To cull is indeed in itself an evil, and it risks setting the example for other and much less justifiable slaughter. It is perfectly true that the choice of individual animals to cull has nothing to do with justice to individuals. As often happens in human affairs when (for instance) it is necessary to allot food or transport hurriedly to one valley rather than another, culling would ignore individual desert for the sake of the common good. In human affairs, we think this legitimate if the danger to the common good is severe enough. Does that make it legitimate here?

The trouble is that some sort of compromise does have to be reached. The point centrally important here is a general one, not just about culling. It is that we have to do justice to the complexity of the problem. There really are two evils. In such hard cases – as also in ones where either of these interests conflicts with those of humans – we have to proceed by careful study of the local factors, not by any sweeping fiat from general principles.

Moreover, we cannot dismiss a particular method wholesale simply because the *pretence* of it has previously been used as a screen to excuse disreputable practices. Culling is indeed a practice whose name has been misused very grossly. (Almost all hunting has now become culling, justified by 'wise management'). Yet the repeated misuse of a name cannot damn a practice. There is, after all, scarcely a good practice in existence whose name has not been borrowed at times to gild something disreputable. Hypocrisy is indeed the tribute that vice pays to virtue. But the question in each particular case is, what actually – here – is the lesser evil? It is surely of the first importance to confront such questions realistically, and not to discredit one's cause by refusing to admit that any clash exists.

BEASTS VERSUS THE BIOSPHERE?

119

BENIGN BY-PASSING

If anyone can find a way round that clash by inventive thinking, that is of course an excellent solution, or partial solution. Conservationists have recently found many such ways, and are deeply engaged in working out their details. Tourism, intelligently managed, can sometimes be used to finance protection of habitat. Though there are many practical difficulties about doing this effectively, and also some objections of principle to relying heavily on it, yet it certainly has made much conservation possible. Again, careful education of the local people to value and respect their creatures can do much to protect reserves and keep down the conflict. Jane Goodall has managed, in this way, to prevent poaching of chimpanzees in the Gombe.

But then, these chimps are not an expanding population, in fact, they are scarcely maintaining their existing numbers. The real trouble arises over populations which do expand, or which are already too big for their habitat. If they are confined to this habitat, they will wreck it; if (as usually happens) they escape, they will wreck the surrounding fields and become 'crop pests'. They may well do both. The problem is immediate; what is to be done?

Contraception is sometimes suggested as an answer. Contraception, however, requires careful and accurate dosing; we have already seen the bad effects of its slapdash use for humans. Using it properly for wild creatures would, on the face of things, mean more or less domesticating them. It is possible indeed to imagine a small population of large and easily recognized creatures – say elephants – being so treated. They would presumably need to be regularly called in, examined and dosed. But there would then be unpredictable behavioural effects from the different age-balance of herds and the absence of calves, effects which would need careful watching. Indeed the entire behaviour would have to be carefully monitored, inevitably increasing the interference with the animals' lives.

For such creatures, the thing is probably not impossible, but – apart from expenses – would it satisfy the demands expressed in claims for animal rights? It would certainly be a major, unchosen, lasting interference with the creatures' existence. And it is one that cannot possibly be supported by those who are in principle opposed to experimentation on animals, since a large, ongoing programme of such experiments would clearly be needed to make it possible.

When, however, we turn from elephants to large populations of small crop-eating creatures such as birds, mice and rabbits, imagination boggles and the whole scheme begins to look hopeless. Does anyone see a way of dosing them? Even at the middle level things are not much better. Processing a whole population of deer or baboons in the way suggested for elephants would be a desperate business, and again it would have quite unpredictable effects on behaviour. However carefully it were done, too, some would be pretty certain to slip through the net, producing unplanned descendants to mess up the project.

120

MARY MIDGLEY

CONCLUSION

I find no pleasure at all in raising these difficulties. If contraception could be made to work, it would have great merits, and if anyone actually does find a way to make it work, good luck to them. As I have just said, inventive, unexpected ideas of this kind are badly needed. But ideas that are not worked out at the practicable level remain as mere fantasies, dreams which only console us and enable us to make speeches. They do real harm by discrediting the central cause and distracting us from fresh thought about the real problem.

That problem mainly arises, of course, from steadily growing human numbers and human bad practice. In meeting it, we are certainly going to have to take many measures which are in one way or another objectionable. For instance, we will need to restrict human freedom to do many things which would be harmless in themselves but which have become ecologically damaging. Circumstances will force us to keep making unwelcome changes in what we permit and forbid. Morally, that is going to call for great honesty and scrupulous discrimination between changes that are actually needed and ones that are not.

But there will also be unavoidable dilemmas concerning the outside world. There too, we shall have to choose between ways of acting which are both objectionable. The matter at issue here – conflicts between the interests of particular animals and those of the wider environment – is only one of these cases. Where it is possible to find ways of keeping the biosphere going without killing or injuring any members of other species – or indeed of our own species – it is surely our business to use those ways, and we ought to make great efforts to find them. Where we cannot find such harmless devices, we ought to keep down the destruction to what is actually unavoidable. But when the only other choice is serious, large-scale damage – for instance by letting a forest turn into a desert – it is hard to see any justification for a continued veto on killing.

We are not, in any case, beings that can exist without doing any sort of harm. We cannot, any more than any other organism, live at all without destroying a great many other living things, animals as well as plants. Whatever our wishes, we are unavoidably a part of the great mass of predatory and destructive animals that produce most deaths in the wild. And among such deaths, the violent kind are often easier than deaths from starvation.

Of course this is not an excuse for wanton killing. But it surely is relevant when the question becomes “which deaths and when?” Deplorably, we are already in the position where we are bound to do some sort of harm, and where our decision about which kinds of harm to do can affect almost every other living thing on the planet. This, however, means that, by accepting and using this responsibility, we can also do much good. It is surely our business to direct things so as to minimize large-scale damage. I do not myself see how this responsibility could fail to override the objections to culling.

About insects, virtually everybody already accepts this position. (Objections

BEASTS VERSUS THE BIOSPHERE?

121

to insecticides on grounds of pollution are of course a different matter). And even about slightly larger 'crop pests' – mice, rabbits, small birds – humane people's attitude is, in practice, usually much the same. Even vegans, after all, would certainly not get their grain and vegetables if crops were not protected, both in field and granary, by killing great numbers of these small potential competitors.

As we go 'up' the scale of life, our acceptance of culling becomes more hesitant. That is reasonable, because individuality does become more important in the lives of more social and intelligent beings. It does mean that we should be less willing to cull deer than rabbits, and elephants than deer, and it also calls for special care about the choice of individuals for culling if we do cull. But to veto all culling, whatever the alternative, is surely a fanatical over-simplification. It seems to me a position only possible for people who do not realistically grasp how bad the alternatives actually presented to us now are.⁴

NOTES

¹ The first trumpet here seems to have been Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*, published in 1949. Leopold's alarming pronouncements, along with others from later prophets, are well discussed by Passmore (1974), chapter 1 and throughout.

² The main architect of this position has been Tom Regan, in his books *The Case for Animal Rights*, *All That Dwell Therein* and many other writings.

³ I have discussed the need to consider both, and the difficulty of bringing them together, in *Animals and Why They Matter*.

⁴ I have not discussed here Peter Singer's suggestion that the political principle of equality calls on us quite simply to refrain from killing other species if we forbid the killing of humans, so that all animal-killing involves criminal 'speciesism'. (See his excellent book *Animal Liberation*, chapters 1 and 6.) This drastic way of cutting short the whole question seems to me to suffer – like other moral panaceas – from confusions which prove disastrous when we try to bring it from the field of campaigning slogans and work it out in practice. For campaigning purposes, however, it has undoubtedly been very useful, which means that there are important elements of truth in it. The bearing of current ideas about equality on the cause of animals is indeed of the greatest interest. I have discussed it at some length in *Animals and Why They Matter*, especially chapters 6 and 9.

REFERENCES

- Leopold, Aldo 1949 *A Sand County Almanac*. New York, Oxford University Press.
 Midgley, Mary 1983 *Animals and Why They Matter*. Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press.
 Passmore, John 1974 *Man's Responsibility for Nature*. London, Duckworth.
 Regan, Tom 1982 *All That Dwell Therein*. London and Berkeley, University of California Press.
 Regan, Tom 1983 *The Case for Animal Rights*. London, Routledge.
 Singer, Peter 1976 *Animal Liberation*. London, Cape.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Part III
Biocentric Approaches



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[15]

ON BEING MORALLY CONSIDERABLE

KENNETH E. GOODPASTER

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

—Aldo Leopold

WHAT follows is a preliminary inquiry into a question which needs more elaborate treatment than an essay can provide. The question can be and has been addressed in different rhetorical formats, but perhaps G. J. Warnock's formulation of it¹ is the best to start with:

Let us consider the question to whom principles of morality apply from, so to speak, the other end—from the standpoint not of the agent, but of the "patient." What, we may ask here, is the condition of moral *relevance*? What is the condition of having a claim to be *considered*, by rational agents to whom moral principles apply? (148)

In the terminology of R. M. Hare (or even Kant), the same question might be put thus: In universalizing our putative moral maxims, what is the scope of the variable over which universalization is to

¹ *The Object of Morality* (New York: Methuen, 1971); parenthetical page references to Warnock will be to this book.

range? A more legalistic idiom, employed recently by Christopher D. Stone,² might ask: What are the requirements for "having standing" in the moral sphere? However the question gets formulated, the thrust is in the direction of necessary and sufficient conditions on *X* in

(1) For all *A*, *X* deserves moral consideration from *A*.

where *A* ranges over rational moral agents and moral 'consideration' is construed broadly to include the most basic forms of practical respect (and so is not restricted to "possession of rights" by *X*).

I

The motivation for addressing such a question stems from several sources. The last decade has seen a significant increase in the concern felt by most persons about "the environment." This new awareness manifests itself in many ways. One is a quest for methods of "technology assessment," for criteria for social choice that capture the relevant costs and benefits (be they quantifiable or not). On another front, heated controversies have arisen over endangered species and our treatment of animals generally (both as sources of food and as sources of experimental knowledge). The morality of abortion and, in general, the proper uses of medical technology have also tried our ethical sensitivities about the scope and nature of moral considerability.

These developments emphasize the importance of clarity about the *framework* of moral consideration as much as about the *application* of that framework. We need to understand better, for example, the scope of moral respect, the sorts of entities that can and should receive moral attention, and the nature of the "good" which morality (since it at least *includes* beneficence) is supposed to promote. In addition, we need principles for weighing or adjudicating conflicting claims to moral consideration.

The question focused on here is therefore only a first step toward the larger task. It is a framework question more than an application question—though its practical relevance is not so remote as to be purely a matter of logical speculation. My convictions about the proper answer to the question are sketched in another place,³ but they can be summarized more explicitly as follows.

Modern moral philosophy has taken ethical egoism as its prin-

² *Should Trees Have Standing?* (Los Altos, Calif.: William Kaufmann, 1974); parenthetical page references to Stone will be to this book.

³ "From Egoism to Environmentalism," in Goodpaster and K. M. Sayre, eds., *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University Press, forthcoming 1978).

principle foil for developing what can fairly be called a *humanistic* perspective on value and obligation. That is, both Kantian and Humean approaches to ethics tend to view the philosophical challenge as that of providing an epistemological and motivational generalization of an agent's natural self-interested concern. Because of this preoccupation with moral "take-off," however, too little critical thought has been devoted to the flight and its destination. One result might be a certain feeling of impotence in the minds of many moral philosophers when faced with the sorts of issues mentioned earlier, issues that question the breadth of the moral enterprise more than its departure point. To be sure, questions of conservation, preservation of the environment, and technology assessment *can* be approached simply as application questions, e.g., "How shall we evaluate the alternatives available to us instrumentally in relation to humanistic satisfactions?" But there is something distressingly uncritical in this way of framing such issues—distressingly uncritical in the way that deciding foreign policy solely in terms of "the national interest" is uncritical. Or at least, so I think.

It seems to me that we should not only wonder about, but actually follow "the road not taken into the wood." Neither rationality nor the capacity to experience pleasure and pain seem to me necessary (even though they may be sufficient) conditions on moral considerability. And only our hedonistic and concentric forms of ethical reflection keep us from acknowledging this fact. Nothing short of the condition of *being alive* seems to me to be a plausible and nonarbitrary criterion. What is more, this criterion, if taken seriously, could admit of application to entities and systems of entities heretofore unimagined as claimants on our moral attention (such as the biosystem itself). Some may be inclined to take such implications as a *reductio* of the move "beyond humanism." I am beginning to be persuaded, however, that such implications may provide both a meaningful ethical vision and the hope of a more adequate action guide for the long-term future. Paradigms are crucial components in knowledge—but they can conceal as much as they reveal. Our paradigms of moral considerability are individual persons and their joys and sorrows. I want to venture the belief that the universe of moral consideration is more complex than these paradigms allow.

II

My strategy, now that my cards are on the table, will be to spell out a few rules of the game (in this section) and then to examine the "hands" of several respected philosophers whose arguments seem to

count against casting the moral net as widely as I am inclined to (sections III, IV, and V). In the concluding section (VI), I will discuss several objections and touch on further questions needing attention.

The first (of four) distinctions that must be kept clear in addressing our question has already been alluded to. It is that between moral *rights* and moral *considerability*. My inclination is to construe the notion of rights as more specific than that of considerability, largely to avoid what seem to be unnecessary complications over the requirements for something's being an appropriate "bearer of rights." The concept of rights is used in wider and narrower senses, of course. Some authors (indeed, one whom we shall consider later in this paper) use it as roughly synonymous with Warnock's notion of "moral relevance." Others believe that being a bearer of rights involves the satisfaction of much more demanding requirements. The sentiments of John Passmore⁴ are probably typical of this narrower view:

The idea of "rights" is simply not applicable to what is non-human . . . It is one thing to say that it is wrong to treat animals cruelly, quite another to say that animals have rights (116/7).

I doubt whether it is so clear that the class of rights-bearers is or ought to be restricted to human beings, but I propose to suspend this question entirely by framing the discussion in terms of the notion of moral considerability (following Warnock), except in contexts where there is reason to think the widest sense of 'rights' is at work. Whether beings who deserve moral consideration in themselves, not simply by reason of their utility to human beings, also possess moral *rights* in some narrow sense is a question which will, therefore, remain open here—and it is a question the answer to which need not be determined in advance.

A second distinction is that between what might be called a *criterion of moral considerability* and a *criterion of moral significance*. The former represents the central quarry here, while the latter, which might easily get confused with the former, aims at governing *comparative* judgments of moral "weight" in cases of conflict. Whether a tree, say, deserves any moral consideration is a question that must be kept separate from the question of whether trees deserve more or less consideration than dogs, or dogs than human persons. We should not expect that the criterion for having "moral standing" at all will be the same as the criterion for adjudicating competing claims to priority among beings that merit that standing.

⁴ *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (New York: Scribner's, 1974).

In fact, it may well be an insufficient appreciation of this distinction which leads some to a preoccupation with rights in dealing with morality. I suspect that the real force of attributions of "rights" derives from comparative contexts, contexts in which moral considerability is presupposed and the issue of strength is crucial. Eventually, of course, the priority issues have to be dealt with for an operational ethical account—this much I have already acknowledged—but in the interests of clarity, I set them aside for now.

Another important distinction, the third, turns on the difference between questions of intelligibility and questions of normative substance. An adequate treatment of this difficult and complicated division would take us far afield,⁵ but a few remarks are in order. It is tempting to assume, with Joel Feinberg,⁶ that we can neatly separate such questions as

- (2) What sorts of beings can (logically) be *said* to deserve moral consideration?

from questions like

- (3) What sorts of beings do, as a matter of "ethical fact" deserve moral consideration?

But our confidence in the separation here wanes (perhaps more quickly than in other philosophical contexts where the conceptual/substantive distinction arises) when we reflect upon the apparent *flexibility* of our metamoral beliefs. One might argue plausibly, for example, that there were times and societies in which the moral standing of blacks was, as a matter of *conceptual analysis*, deniable. Examples could be multiplied to include women, children, fetuses, and various other instances of what might be called "metamoral disenfranchisement." I suspect that the lesson to be learned here is that, as William Frankena has pointed out,⁷ metaethics is, and has always been, a partially normative discipline. Whether we are to take this to mean that it is really impossible ever to engage in morally neutral conceptual analysis in ethics is, of course, another question. In any case, it appears that, with respect to the issue at hand, keeping (2) and (3) apart will be difficult. At the very least, I think, we must be wary of arguments that purport to answer (3) *solely* on the basis of "ordinary language"-style answers to (2).

⁵ Cf. R. M. Hare, "The Argument from Received Opinion," in *Essays on Philosophical Method* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 117.

⁶ "The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations," in Blackstone, *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis* (University of Georgia, 1974), p. 43; parenthetical page references to Feinberg will be to this paper.

⁷ "On Saying the Ethical Thing," in Goodpaster, ed., *Perspectives on Morality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University Press, 1976), pp. 107-124.

Though the focus of the present inquiry is more normative than conceptual [hence aimed more at (3) than at (2)], it remains what I called a “framework” inquiry nonetheless, since it prescind from the question of relative weights (moral significance) of moral considerability claims.

Moreover—and this brings us to the fourth and last distinction—there is another respect in which the present inquiry involves framework questions rather than questions of application. There is clearly a sense in which we are subject to *thresholds* of moral sensitivity just as we are subject to thresholds of cognitive or perceptual sensitivity. Beyond such thresholds we are “morally blind” or suffer disintegrative consequences analogous to “information overload” in a computer. In the face of our conative limitations, we often will distinguish between moral demands that are relative to those limitations and moral demands that are not. The latter demands represent claims on our consideration or respect which we acknowledge as in some sense ideally determinative if not practically determinative. We might mark this distinction by borrowing Ross’s categories of “prima facie vs. actual duty” except that (A) these categories tend to map more naturally onto the distinction mentioned earlier between considerability and significance, and (B) these categories tend to evoke conditionality and lack thereof of a sort which is rooted more in a plurality of “external” moral pressures than in an agent’s “internal” capacities for practical response. Let us, then, say that the moral considerability of *X* is *operative* for an agent *A* if and only if the thorough acknowledgment of *X* by *A* is psychologically (and in general, causally) possible for *A*. If the moral considerability of *X* is defensible on all grounds independent of operativity, we shall say that it is *regulative*. An agent may, for example, have an obligation to grant regulative considerability to all living things, but be able psychologically and in terms of his own nutrition to grant operative consideration to a much smaller class of things (though note that capacities in this regard differ among persons and change over time).

Using all these distinctions, and the rough and ready terminology that they yield, we can now state the issue in (1) as a concern for a relatively substantive (vs. purely logical) criterion of moral considerability (vs. moral significance) of a regulative (vs. operative) sort. As far as I can see, *X*’s being a living thing is both necessary and sufficient for moral considerability so understood, whatever may be the case for the moral *rights* that rational agents should acknowledge.

III

Let us begin with Warnock's own answer to the question, now that the question has been clarified somewhat. In setting out his answer, Warnock argues (in my view, persuasively) against two more restrictive candidates. The first, what might be called the *Kantian principle*, amounts to little more than a reflection of the requirements of moral agency onto those of moral considerability:

- (4) For *X* to deserve moral consideration from *A*, *X* must be a rational human person.

Observing that such a criterion of considerability eliminates children and mentally handicapped adults, among others, Warnock dismisses it as intolerably narrow.

The second candidate, actually a more generous variant of the first, sets the limits of moral considerability by disjoining "potentiality":

- (5) For all *A*, *X* deserves moral consideration from *A* if and only if *X* is a rational human person or is a potential rational human person.

Warnock's reply to this suggestion is also persuasive. Infants and imbeciles are no doubt potentially rational, but this does not appear to be the reason why we should not maltreat them. And we would not say that an imbecile reasonably judged to be incurable would thereby reasonably be taken to have no moral claims (151). In short, it seems arbitrary to draw the boundary of moral *considerability* around rational human beings (actual or potential), however plausible it might be to draw the boundary of moral *responsibility* there.⁸

Warnock then settles upon his own solution. The basis of moral claims, he says, may be put as follows:

. . . just as liability to be judged as a moral agent follows from one's general capability of alleviating, by moral action, the ills of the predicament, and is for that reason confined to rational beings, so the condition of being a proper "beneficiary" of moral action is the capability of *suffering* the ills of the predicament—and for that reason is not confined to rational beings, nor even to potential members of that class (151).

The criterion of moral considerability then, is located in the *capacity to suffer*:

- (6) For all *A*, *X* deserves moral consideration from *A* if and

⁸ Actually, it seems to me that we ought not to draw the boundary of moral responsibility just here. See my "Morality and Organizations," forthcoming in *Proceedings of the Second National Conference on Business Ethics* (Waltham, Mass.: Bentley College, 1978).

only if *X* is capable of suffering pain (or experiencing enjoyment).

And the defense involves appeal to what Warnock considers to be (analytically) the *object* of the moral enterprise: amelioration of "the predicament."

Now two issues arise immediately in the wake of this sort of appeal. The first has to do with Warnock's own over-all strategy in the context of the quoted passage. Earlier on in his book, he insists that the appropriate analysis of the concept of morality will lead us to an "object" whose pursuit provides the framework for ethics. But the "object" seems to be more restrictive:

. . . the general object of moral evaluation must be to contribute in some respects, by way of the actions of rational beings, to the amelioration of the human predicament—that is, of the conditions in which *these* rational beings, humans, actually find themselves (16; emphasis in the original).

It appears that, by the time moral considerability comes up later in the book, Warnock has changed his mind about the object of morality by enlarging the "predicament" to include nonhumans.

The second issue turns on the question of analysis itself. As I suggested earlier, it is difficult to keep conceptual and substantive questions apart in the present context. We can, of course, stipulatively *define* 'morality' as both having an object and having the object of mitigating suffering. But, in the absence of more argument, such definition is itself in need of a warrant. Twentieth-century preoccupation with the naturalistic or definist fallacy should have taught us at least this much.

Neither of these two observations shows that Warnock's suggested criterion is wrong, of course. But they do, I think, put us in a rather more demanding mood. And the mood is aggravated when we look to two other writers on the subject who appear to hold similar views.

W. K. Frankena, in a recent paper,⁹ joins forces:

Like Warnock, I believe that there are right and wrong ways to treat infants, animals, imbeciles, and idiots even if or even though (as the case may be) they are not persons or human beings—just because they are capable of pleasure and suffering, and not just because their lives happen to have some value to or for those who clearly are persons or human beings.

⁹ "Ethics and the Environment," forthcoming in Goodpaster and Sayre, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ "All Animals Are Equal," in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976). See p. 316.

And Peter Singer¹⁰ writes:

If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. This is why the limit of sentience (using the term as a convenient, if not strictly accurate, shorthand for the capacity to suffer or experience enjoyment or happiness) is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others (154).

I say that the mood is aggravated because, although I acknowledge and even applaud the conviction expressed by these philosophers that the capacity to suffer (or perhaps better, *sentience*) is sufficient for moral considerability, I fail to understand their reasons for thinking such a criterion necessary. To be sure, there are hints at reasons in each case. Warnock implies that nonsentient beings could not be proper "beneficiaries" of moral action. Singer seems to think that beyond sentience "there is nothing to take into account." And Frankena suggests that nonsentient beings simply do not provide us with moral reasons for respecting them unless it be potentiality for sentience.¹¹ Yet it is so clear that there *is* something to take into account, something that is not merely "potential sentience" and which surely does qualify beings as beneficiaries and capable of harm—namely, *life*—that the hints provided seem to me to fall short of good reasons.

Biologically, it appears that sentience is an adaptive characteristic of living organisms that provides them with a better capacity to anticipate, and so avoid, threats to life. This at least suggests, though of course it does not prove, that the capacities to suffer and to enjoy are ancillary to something more important rather than tickets to considerability in their own right. In the words of one perceptive scientific observer:

If we view pleasure as rooted in our sensory physiology, it is not difficult to see that our neurophysiological equipment must have evolved via variation and selective retention in such a way as to record a positive signal to adaptationally satisfactory conditions and a negative signal to adaptationally unsatisfactory conditions . . . The pleasure signal is only an evolutionarily derived indicator, not the goal itself.

¹¹ "I can see no reason, from the moral point of view, why we should respect something that is alive but has no conscious sentience and so can experience no pleasure or pain, joy or suffering, unless perhaps it is potentially a consciously sentient being, as in the case of a fetus. Why, if leaves and trees have no capacity to feel pleasure or to suffer, should I tear no leaf from a tree? Why should I respect its location any more than that of a stone in my driveway, if no benefit or harm comes to any person or sentient being by my moving it?" ("Ethics and the Environment.")

It is the applause which signals a job well done, but not the actual completion of the job.¹²

Nor is it absurd to imagine that evolution might have resulted (indeed might still result?) in beings whose capacities to maintain, protect, and advance their lives did not depend upon mechanisms of pain and pleasure at all.

So far, then, we can see that the search for a criterion of moral considerability takes one quickly and plausibly beyond humanism. But there is a tendency, exhibited in the remarks of Warnock, Frankena, and Singer, to draw up the wagons around the notion of sentience. I have suggested that there is reason to go further and not very much in the way of argument not to. But perhaps there is a stronger and more explicit case that can be made for sentience. I think there is, in a way, and I propose to discuss it in detail in the section that follows.

IV

Joel Feinberg offers (51) what may be the clearest and most explicit case for a restrictive criterion on moral considerability (restrictive with respect to life). I should mention at the outset, however, that the context for his remarks is

- (I) the concept of "rights," which, we have seen, is sometimes taken to be narrower than the concept of "considerability"; and
- (II) the *intelligibility* of rights-attributions, which, we have seen, is problematically related to the more substantive issue of what beings deserve moral consideration.

These two features of Feinberg's discussion might be thought sufficient to invalidate my use of that discussion here. But the context of his remarks is clearly such that 'rights' is taken very broadly, much closer to what I am calling moral considerability than to what Passmore calls "rights." And the thrust of the arguments, since they are directed against the *intelligibility* of certain rights attributions, is *a fortiori* relevant to the more substantive issue set out in (1). So I propose to treat Feinberg's arguments as if they were addressed to the considerability issue in its more substantive form, whether or not they were or would be intended to have such general application. I do so with due notice to the possible need for scare-quotes around Feinberg's name, but with the conviction that it is really in

¹² Mark W. Lipsey, "Value Science and Developing Society," paper delivered to the Society for Religion in Higher Education, Institute on Society, Technology and Values (July 15-Aug. 4, 1973), p. 11.

Feinberg's discussion that we discover the clearest line of argument in favor of something like sentience, an argument which was only hinted at in the remarks of Warnock, Frankena, and Singer.

The central thesis defended by Feinberg is that a being cannot intelligibly be said to possess moral rights (read: deserve moral consideration) unless that being satisfies the "interest principle," and that only the subclass of humans and higher animals among living beings satisfies this principle:

. . . the sorts of beings who can have rights are precisely those who have (or can have) interests. I have come to this tentative conclusion for two reasons: (1) because a right holder must be capable of being represented and it is impossible to represent a being that has no interests, and (2) because a right holder must be capable of being a beneficiary in his own person, and a being without interests is a being that is incapable of being harmed or benefited, having no good or "sake" of its own (51).

Implicit in this passage are the following two arguments, interpreted in terms of moral considerability:

(A1) Only beings who can be represented can deserve moral consideration.

Only beings who have (or can have) interests can be represented.

Therefore, only beings who have (or can have) interests can deserve moral consideration.

(A2) Only beings capable of being beneficiaries can deserve moral consideration.

Only beings who have (or can have) interests are capable of being beneficiaries.

Therefore, only beings who have (or can have) interests can deserve moral consideration.

I suspect that these two arguments are at work between the lines in Warnock, Frankena, and Singer, though of course one can never be sure. In any case, I propose to consider them as the best defense of the sentience criterion in recent literature.

I am prepared to grant, with some reservations, the first premises in each of these obviously valid arguments. The second premises, though, are *both* importantly equivocal. To claim that only beings who have (or can have) interests can be represented might mean that "mere things" cannot be represented because they have nothing to represent, no "interests" as opposed to "usefulness" to defend or protect. Similarly, to claim that only beings who have (or can have)

interests are capable of being beneficiaries might mean that “mere things” are incapable of being benefited or harmed—they have no “well-being” to be sought or acknowledged by rational moral agents. So construed, Feinberg seems to be right; but he also seems to be committed to allowing any *living* thing the status of moral considerability. For as he himself admits, even plants

. . . are not “mere things”; they are vital objects with inherited biological propensities determining their natural growth. Moreover we do say that certain conditions are “good” or “bad” for plants, thereby suggesting that plants, unlike rocks, are capable of having a “good” (51).

But Feinberg pretty clearly wants to draw the nets tighter than this—and he does so by interpreting the notion of “interests” in the two second premises more narrowly. The contrast term he favors is not ‘mere things’ but ‘mindless creatures’. And he makes this move by insisting that “interests” logically presuppose *desires* or *wants* or *aims*, the equipment for which is not possessed by plants (nor, we might add, by many animals or even some humans?).

But why should we accept this shift in strength of the criterion? In doing so, we clearly abandon one sense in which living organisms like plants do have interests that can be represented. There is no absurdity in imagining the representation of the needs of a tree for sun and water in the face of a proposal to cut it down or pave its immediate radius for a parking lot. We might of course, on reflection, decide to go ahead and cut it down or do the paving, but there is hardly an intelligibility problem about representing the tree’s interest in our deciding not to. In the face of their obvious tendencies to maintain and heal themselves, it is very difficult to reject the idea of interests on the part of trees (and plants generally) in remaining alive.¹³

Nor will it do to suggest, as Feinberg does, that the needs (interests) of living things like trees are not really their own but implicitly *ours*: “Plants may need things in order to discharge their functions, but their functions are assigned by human interests, not their own” (54). As if it were human interests that assigned to trees the tasks of growth or maintenance! The interests at stake are clearly those of the living things themselves, not simply those of the owners or users or other human persons involved. Indeed, there is a suggestion in this passage that, to be capable of being represented, an organism must *matter* to human beings somehow—a suggestion

¹³ See Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, *The Living State* (New York: Academic Press, 1972), esp. ch. vi, “Vegetable Defense Systems.”

whose implications for human rights (disenfranchisement) let alone the rights of animals (inconsistently for Feinberg, I think)—are grim.

The truth seems to be that the “interests” that nonsentient beings share with sentient beings (over and against “mere things”) are far more plausible as criteria of *considerability* than the “interests” that sentient beings share (over and against “mindless creatures”). This is not to say that interests construed in the latter way are morally irrelevant—for they may play a role as criteria of moral *significance*—but it is to say that psychological or hedonic capacities seem unnecessarily sophisticated when it comes to locating the minimal conditions for something’s deserving to be valued for its own sake. Surprisingly, Feinberg’s own reflections on “mere things” appear to support this very point:

. . . mere things have no conative life: no conscious wishes, desires, and hopes; or urges and impulses; or unconscious drives, aims, and goals; or latent tendencies, direction of growth, and natural fulfillments. Interests must be compounded somehow out of conations; hence mere things have no interests (49).

Together with the acknowledgment, quoted earlier, that plants, for example, are not “mere things,” such observations seem to undermine the interest principle in its more restrictive form. I conclude, with appropriate caution, that the interest principle either grows to fit what we might call a “life principle” or requires an arbitrary stipulation of psychological capacities (for desires, wants, etc.) which are neither warranted by (A1) and (A2) nor independently plausible.

v

Thus far, I have examined the views of four philosophers on the necessity of sentience or interests (narrowly conceived) as a condition on moral considerability. I have maintained that these views are not plausibly supported, when they are supported at all, because of a reluctance to acknowledge in nonsentient living beings the presence of independent needs, capacities for benefit and harm, etc. I should like, briefly, to reflect on a more general level about the roots of this reluctance before proceeding to a consideration of objections against the “life” criterion which I have been defending. In the course of this reflection, we might gain some insight into the sources of our collective hesitation in viewing environmental ethics in a “nonchauvinistic” way.¹⁴

When we consider the reluctance to go beyond sentience in the context of moral consideration—and look for both explanations

¹⁴ Cf. R. and V. Routley, “Not for Humans Only,” in Goodpaster and Sayre, note 3. R. Routley is, I think, the originator of the phrase ‘human chauvinism’.

and justifications—two thoughts come to mind. The first is that, given the connection between beneficence (or nonmaleficence) and morality, it is natural that limits on moral considerability will come directly from limits on the range of beneficiaries (or “maleficiaries”). This is implicit in Warnock and explicit in Feinberg. The second thought is that, if one’s conception of the good is *hedonistic* in character, one’s conception of a beneficiary will quite naturally be restricted to beings who are capable of pleasure and pain. If pleasure or satisfaction is the only ultimate gift we have to give, morally, then it is to be expected that only those equipped to receive such a gift will enter into our moral deliberation. And if pain or dissatisfaction is the only ultimate harm we can cause, then it is to be expected that only those equipped for it will deserve our consideration. There seems, therefore, to be a noncontingent connection between a hedonistic or quasi-hedonistic¹⁵ theory of value and a response to the moral-considerability question which favors sentience or interest possession (narrowly conceived).

One must, of course, avoid drawing too strong a conclusion about this connection. It does not follow from the fact that hedonism leads naturally to the sentience criterion either that it entails that criterion or that one who holds that criterion must be a hedonist in his theory of value. For one might be a hedonist with respect to the good and yet think that moral consideration was, on other grounds, restricted to a subclass of the beings capable of enjoyment or pain. And one might hold to the sentience criterion for considerability while denying that pleasure, for example, was the only intrinsically good thing in the life of a human (or nonhuman) being. So hedonism about value and the sentience criterion of moral considerability are not logically equivalent. Nor does either entail the other. But there is some sense, I think, in which they mutually support each other—both in terms of “rendering plausible” and in terms of “helping to explain.” As Derek Parfit is fond of putting it, “there are no entailments, but then there seldom are in moral reasoning.”¹⁶

Let me hazard the hypothesis, then, that there is a nonaccidental affinity between a person’s or a society’s conception of value and its conception of moral considerability. More specifically, there is an affinity between hedonism or some variation on hedonism and a predilection for the sentience criterion of considerability or some

¹⁵ Frankena uses the phrase “quasi-hedonist” in *Ethics* (Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 90.

¹⁶ “Later Selves and Moral Principles,” in A. Montefiori, ed., *Philosophy and Personal Relations* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 147.

variation on it. The implications one might draw from this are many. In the context of a quest for a richer moral framework to deal with a new awareness of the environment, one might be led to expect significant resistance from a hedonistic society unless one forced one's imperatives into an instrumental form. One might also be led to an appreciation of how technology aimed at largely hedonistic goals could gradually "harden the hearts" of a civilization to the biotic community in which it lives—at least until crisis or upheaval raised some questions.¹⁷

VI

Let us now turn to several objections that might be thought to render a "life principle" of moral considerability untenable quite independently of the adequacy or inadequacy of the sentience or interest principle.

(O1) A principle of moral respect or consideration for life in all its forms is mere Schweitzerian romanticism, even if it does not involve, as it probably does, the projection of mental or psychological categories beyond their responsible boundaries into the realms of plants, insects, and microbes.

(R1) This objection misses the central thrust of my discussion, which is *not* that the sentience criterion is necessary, but applicable to all life forms—rather the point is that the possession of sentience is not necessary for moral considerability. Schweitzer himself may have held the former view—and so have been "romantic"—but this is beside the point.

(O2) To suggest seriously that moral considerability is coextensive with life is to suggest that conscious, feeling beings have no more central role in the moral life than vegetables, which is downright absurd—if not perverse.

(R2) This objection misses the central thrust of my discussion as well, for a different reason. It is consistent with acknowledging the moral considerability of all life forms to go on to point out differ-

¹⁷ There is more, but much depends, I think, on defending claims about the value theory at work in our society and about the need for noninstrumental approaches to value change. Value theory, like scientific theory, tends to evolve by trying to accommodate to the conventional pattern any new suggestions about what is good or should be respected. I suspect that the analogy holds true for the explanations to be given of ethical revolutions—a new and simpler way of dealing with our moral sense emerges to take the place of the old contrivances—be they egoistic, utilitarian, or in the present case hedonistic (if not humanistic). Such topics are, of course, not the topics of this essay. Perhaps I can be excused for raising them here by the contention that a line of argument in ethics (indeed, in philosophy generally) needs not only to be criticized—it needs to be *understood*.

ences of moral significance among these life forms. And as far as perversion is concerned, history will perhaps be a better judge of our civilization's treatment of animals and the living environment on that score.

(O3) Consideration of life can serve as a criterion only to the degree that life itself can be given a precise definition; and it can't.

(R3) I fail to see why a criterion of moral considerability must be strictly decidable in order to be tenable. Surely rationality, potential rationality, sentience, and the capacity for or possession of interests fare no better here. Moreover, there do seem to be empirically respectable accounts of the nature of living beings available which are not intolerably vague or open-textured:

The typifying mark of a living system . . . appears to be its persistent state of low entropy, sustained by metabolic processes for accumulating energy, and maintained in equilibrium with its environment by homeostatic feedback processes.¹⁸

Granting the need for certain further qualifications, a definition such as this strikes me as not only plausible in its own right, but ethically illuminating, since it suggests that the core of moral concern lies in respect for self-sustaining organization and integration in the face of pressures toward high entropy.

(O4) If life, as understood in the previous response, is really taken as the key to moral considerability, then it is possible that larger systems besides our ordinarily understood "linear" extrapolations from human beings (e.g., animals, plants, etc.) might satisfy the conditions, such as the biosystem as a whole. This surely would be a *reductio* of the life principle.

(R4) At best, it would be a *reductio* of the life principle in this form or without qualification. But it seems to me that such (perhaps surprising) implications, if true, should be taken seriously. There is some evidence that the biosystem as a whole exhibits behavior approximating to the definition sketched above,¹⁹ and I see no reason to deny it moral considerability on that account. Why should the universe of moral considerability map neatly onto our medium-sized framework of organisms?

(O5) There are severe epistemological problems about imputing interests, benefits, harms, etc. to nonsentient beings. What is it for a tree to have needs?

¹⁸ K. M. Sayre, *Cybernetics and the Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Humanities, 1976), p. 91.

¹⁹ See J. Lovelock and S. Epton, "The Quest for Gaia," *The New Scientist*, LXV, 935 (Feb. 6, 1975): 304-309.

(R5) I am not convinced that the epistemological problems are more severe in this context than they would be in numerous others which the objector would probably not find problematic. Christopher Stone has put this point nicely:

I am sure I can judge with more certainty and meaningfulness whether and when my lawn wants (needs) water than the Attorney General can judge whether and when the United States wants (needs) to take an appeal from an adverse judgment by a lower court. The lawn tells me that it wants water by a certain dryness of the blades and soil—immediately obvious to the touch—the appearance of bald spots, yellowing, and a lack of springiness after being walked on; how does “the United States” communicate to the Attorney General? (24).

We make decisions in the interests of others or on behalf of others every day—“others” whose wants are far less verifiable than those of most living creatures.

(O6) Whatever the force of the previous objections, the clearest and most decisive refutation of the principle of respect for life is that one cannot *live* according to it, nor is there any indication in nature that we were intended to. We must eat, experiment to gain knowledge, protect ourselves from predation (macroscopic and microscopic), and in general deal with the overwhelming complexities of the moral life while remaining psychologically intact. To take seriously the criterion of considerability being defended, all these things must be seen as somehow morally wrong.

(R6) This objection, if it is not met by implication in (R2), can be met, I think, by recalling the distinction made earlier between regulative and operative moral consideration. It seems to me that there clearly are limits to the operational character of respect for living things. We must eat, and usually this involves killing (though not always). We must have knowledge, and sometimes this involves experimentation with living things and killing (though not always). We must protect ourselves from predation and disease, and sometimes this involves killing (though not always). The regulative character of the moral consideration due to all living things asks, as far as I can see, for sensitivity and awareness, not for suicide (psychic or otherwise). But it is not vacuous, in that it does provide a *ceteris paribus* encouragement in the direction of nutritional, scientific, and medical practices of a genuinely life-respecting sort.

As for the implicit claim, in the objection, that since nature doesn't respect life, we needn't, there are two rejoinders. The first is that the premise is not so clearly true. Gratuitous killing in nature is rare indeed. The second, and more important, response is

that the issue at hand has to do with the appropriate moral demands to be made on rational moral agents, not on beings who are not rational moral agents. Besides, this objection would tell equally against *any* criterion of moral considerability so far as I can see, if the suggestion is that nature is amoral.

I have been discussing the necessary and sufficient conditions that should regulate moral consideration. As indicated earlier, however, numerous other questions are waiting in the wings. Central among them are questions dealing with how to balance competing claims to consideration in a world in which such competing claims seem pervasive. Related to these questions would be problems about the relevance of developing or declining status in life (the very young and the very old) and the relevance of the part-whole relation (leaves to a tree; species to an ecosystem). And there are many others.

Perhaps enough has been said, however, to clarify an important project for contemporary ethics, if not to defend a full-blown account of moral considerability and moral significance. Leopold's ethical vision and its implications for modern society in the form of an environmental ethic are important—so we should proceed with care in assessing it.

The Ethics of Respect for Nature

Paul W. Taylor*

I present the foundational structure for a life-centered theory of environmental ethics. The structure consists of three interrelated components. First is the adopting of a certain ultimate moral attitude toward nature, which I call "respect for nature." Second is a belief system that constitutes a way of conceiving of the natural world and of our place in it. This belief system underlies and supports the attitude in a way that makes it an appropriate attitude to take toward the Earth's natural ecosystems and their life communities. Third is a system of moral rules and standards for guiding our treatment of those ecosystems and life communities, a set of normative principles which give concrete embodiment or expression to the attitude of respect for nature. The theory set forth and defended here is, I hold, structurally symmetrical with a theory of human ethics based on the principle of respect for persons.

I. HUMAN-CENTERED AND LIFE-CENTERED SYSTEMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

In this paper I show how the taking of a certain ultimate moral attitude toward nature, which I call "respect for nature," has a central place in the foundations of a life-centered system of environmental ethics. I hold that a set of moral norms (both standards of character and rules of conduct) governing human treatment of the natural world is a rationally grounded set if and only if, first, commitment to those norms is a practical entailment of adopting the attitude of respect for nature as an ultimate moral attitude, and second, the adopting of that attitude on the part of all rational agents can itself be justified. When the basic characteristics of the attitude of respect for nature are made clear, it will be seen that a life-centered system of environmental ethics need not be holistic or organicist in its conception of the kinds of entities that are deemed the appropriate objects of moral concern and consideration. Nor does such a system require that the concepts of ecological homeostasis, equilibrium, and integrity provide us with normative principles from which could be derived (with the addition of factual knowledge) our obligations with regard

* Department of Philosophy, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, Bedford Avenue and H, Brooklyn, NY 11210. Taylor's special fields are ethics and theory of value. He is the author of *Normative Discourse* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961) and *Principles of Ethics: An Introduction* (Encino, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1975), and has also edited two books of readings: *The Moral Judgment: Readings in Contemporary Meta-Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963) and *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Encino, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1971).

to natural ecosystems. The "balance of nature" is not itself a moral norm, however important may be the role it plays in our general outlook on the natural world that underlies the attitude of respect for nature. I argue that finally it is the good (well-being, welfare) of individual organisms, considered as entities having inherent worth, that determines our moral relations with the Earth's wild communities of life.

In designating the theory to be set forth as life-centered, I intend to contrast it with all anthropocentric views. According to the latter, human actions affecting the natural environment and its nonhuman inhabitants are right (or wrong) by either of two criteria: they have consequences which are favorable (or unfavorable) to human well-being, or they are consistent (or inconsistent) with the system of norms that protect and implement human rights. From this human-centered standpoint it is to humans and only to humans that all duties are ultimately owed. We may have responsibilities *with regard to* the natural ecosystems and biotic communities of our planet, but these responsibilities are in every case based on the contingent fact that our treatment of those ecosystems and communities of life can further the realization of human values and/or human rights. We have no obligation to promote or protect the good of nonhuman living things, independently of this contingent fact.

A life-centered system of environmental ethics is opposed to human-centered ones precisely on this point. From the perspective of a life-centered theory, we have *prima facie* moral obligations that are owed to wild plants and animals themselves as members of the Earth's biotic community. We are morally bound (other things being equal) to protect or promote their good for *their* sake. Our duties to respect the integrity of natural ecosystems, to preserve endangered species, and to avoid environmental pollution stem from the fact that these are ways in which we can help make it possible for wild species populations to achieve and maintain a healthy existence in a natural state. Such obligations are due those living things out of recognition of their inherent worth. They are entirely additional to and independent of the obligations we owe to our fellow humans. Although many of the actions that fulfill one set of obligations will also fulfill the other, two different grounds of obligation are involved. Their well-being, as well as human well-being, is something to be realized *as an end in itself*.

If we were to accept a life-centered theory of environmental ethics, a profound reordering of our moral universe would take place. We would begin to look at the whole of the Earth's biosphere in a new light. Our duties with respect to the "world" of nature would be seen as making *prima facie* claims upon us to be balanced against our duties with respect to the "world" of human civilization. We could no longer simply take the human point of view and consider the effects of our actions exclusively from the perspective of our own good.

II. THE GOOD OF A BEING AND THE CONCEPT OF INHERENT WORTH

What would justify acceptance of a life-centered system of ethical principles? In order to answer this it is first necessary to make clear the fundamental moral attitude that underlies and makes intelligible the commitment to live by such a system. It is then necessary to examine the considerations that would justify any rational agent's adopting that moral attitude.

Two concepts are essential to the taking of a moral attitude of the sort in question. A being which does not "have" these concepts, that is, which is unable to grasp their meaning and conditions of applicability, cannot be said to have the attitude as part of its moral outlook. These concepts are, first, that of the good (well-being, welfare) of a living thing, and second, the idea of an entity possessing inherent worth. I examine each concept in turn.

(1) Every organism, species population, and community of life has a good of its own which moral agents can intentionally further or damage by their actions. To say that an entity has a good of its own is simply to say that, without reference to any *other* entity, it can be benefited or harmed. One can act in its overall interest or contrary to its overall interest, and environmental conditions can be good for it (advantageous to it) or bad for it (disadvantageous to it). What is good for an entity is what "does it good" in the sense of enhancing or preserving its life and well-being. What is bad for an entity is something that is detrimental to its life and well-being.¹

We can think of the good of an individual nonhuman organism as consisting in the full development of its biological powers. Its good is realized to the extent that it is strong and healthy. It possesses whatever capacities it needs for successfully coping with its environment and so preserving its existence throughout the various stages of the normal life cycle of its species. The good of a population or community of such individuals consists in the population or community maintaining itself from generation to generation as a coherent system of genetically and ecologically related organisms whose average good is at an optimum level for the given environment. (Here *average good* means that the degree of realization of the good of *individual organisms* in the population or community is, on average, greater than would be the case under any other ecologically functioning order of interrelations among those species populations in the given ecosystem.)

The idea of a being having a good of its own, as I understand it, does not entail that the being must have interests or take an interest in what affects its life for better or for worse. We can act in a being's interest or contrary to its

¹ The conceptual links between an entity *having* a good, something being good *for* it, and events doing good *to* it are examined by G. H. Von Wright in *The Varieties of Goodness* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), chaps. 3 and 5.

interest without its being interested in what we are doing to it in the sense of wanting or not wanting us to do it. It may, indeed, be wholly unaware that favorable and unfavorable events are taking place in its life. I take it that trees, for example, have no knowledge or desires or feelings. Yet it is undoubtedly the case that trees can be harmed or benefited by our actions. We can crush their roots by running a bulldozer too close to them. We can see to it that they get adequate nourishment and moisture by fertilizing and watering the soil around them. Thus we can help or hinder them in the realization of their good. It is the good of trees themselves that is thereby affected. We can similarly act so as to further the good of an entire tree population of a certain species (say, all the redwood trees in a California valley) or the good of a whole community of plant life in a given wilderness area, just as we can do harm to such a population or community.

When construed in this way, the concept of a being's good is not coextensive with sentience or the capacity for feeling pain. William Frankena has argued for a general theory of environmental ethics in which the ground of a creature's being worthy of moral consideration is its sentience. I have offered some criticisms of this view elsewhere, but the full refutation of such a position, it seems to me, finally depends on the positive reasons for accepting a life-centered theory of the kind I am defending in this essay.²

It should be noted further that I am leaving open the question of whether machines—in particular, those which are not only goal-directed, but also self-regulating—can properly be said to have a good of their own.³ Since I am concerned only with human treatment of wild organisms, species populations, and communities of life as they occur in our planet's natural ecosystems, it is to those entities alone that the concept "having a good of its own" will here be applied. I am not denying that other living things, whose genetic origin and environmental conditions have been produced, controlled, and manipulated by humans for human ends, do have a good of their own in the same sense as do wild plants and animals. It is not my purpose in this essay, however, to set out or defend the principles that should guide our conduct with regard to their good. It is only insofar as their production and use by humans have good or ill effects upon natural ecosystems and their wild inhabitants that the ethics of respect for nature comes into play.

(2) The second concept essential to the moral attitude of respect for nature is the idea of inherent worth. We take that attitude toward wild living things

² See W. K. Frankena, "Ethics and the Environment," in K.E. Goodpaster and K.M. Sayre, eds., *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 3–20. I critically examine Frankena's views in "Frankena on Environmental Ethics," *Monist*, forthcoming.

³ In the light of considerations set forth in Daniel Dennett's *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Montgomery, Vermont: Bradford Books, 1978), it is advisable to leave this question unsettled at this time. When machines are developed that function in the way our brains do, we may well come to deem them proper subjects of moral consideration.

(individuals, species populations, or whole biotic communities) when and only when we regard them as entities possessing inherent worth. Indeed, it is only because they are conceived in this way that moral agents can think of themselves as having validly binding duties, obligations, and responsibilities that are *owed* to them as their *due*. I am not at this juncture arguing why they *should* be so regarded; I consider it at length below. But so regarding them is a presupposition of our taking the attitude of respect toward them and accordingly understanding ourselves as bearing certain moral relations to them. This can be shown as follows:

What does it mean to regard an entity that has a good of its own as possessing inherent worth? Two general principles are involved: the principle of moral consideration and the principle of intrinsic value.

According to the principle of moral consideration, wild living things are deserving of the concern and consideration of all moral agents simply in virtue of their being members of the Earth's community of life. From the moral point of view their good must be taken into account whenever it is affected for better or worse by the conduct of rational agents. This holds no matter what species the creature belongs to. The good of each is to be accorded some value and so acknowledged as having some weight in the deliberations of all rational agents. Of course, it may be necessary for such agents to act in ways contrary to the good of this or that particular organism or group of organisms in order to further the good of others, including the good of humans. But the principle of moral consideration prescribes that, with respect to each being an entity having its own good, every individual is deserving of consideration.

The principle of intrinsic value states that, regardless of what kind of entity it is in other respects, if it is a member of the Earth's community of life, the realization of its good is something *intrinsically* valuable. This means that its good is *prima facie* worthy of being preserved or promoted as an end in itself and for the sake of the entity whose good it is. Insofar as we regard any organism, species population, or life community as an entity having inherent worth, we believe that it must never be treated as if it were a mere object or thing whose entire value lies in being instrumental to the good of some other entity. The well-being of each is judged to have value in and of itself.

Combining these two principles, we can now define what it means for a living thing or group of living things to possess inherent worth. To say that it possesses inherent worth is to say that its good is deserving of the concern and consideration of all moral agents, and that the realization of its good has intrinsic value, to be pursued as an end in itself and for the sake of the entity whose good it is.

The duties owed to wild organisms, species populations, and communities of life in the Earth's natural ecosystems are grounded on their inherent worth. When rational, autonomous agents regard such entities as possessing inherent worth, they place intrinsic value on the realization of their good and so hold

themselves responsible for performing actions that will have this effect and for refraining from actions having the contrary effect.

III. THE ATTITUDE OF RESPECT FOR NATURE

Why should moral agents regard wild living things in the natural world as possessing inherent worth? To answer this question we must first take into account the fact that, when rational, autonomous agents subscribe to the principles of moral consideration and intrinsic value and so conceive of wild living things as having that kind of worth, such agents are *adopting a certain ultimate moral attitude toward the natural world*. This is the attitude I call "respect for nature." It parallels the attitude of respect for persons in human ethics. When we adopt the attitude of respect for persons as the proper (fitting, appropriate) attitude to take toward all persons as persons, we consider the fulfillment of the basic interests of each individual to have intrinsic value. We thereby make a moral commitment to live a certain kind of life in relation to other persons. We place ourselves under the direction of a system of standards and rules that we consider validly binding on all moral agents as such.⁴

Similarly, when we adopt the attitude of respect for nature as an ultimate moral attitude we make a commitment to live by certain normative principles. These principles constitute the rules of conduct and standards of character that are to govern our treatment of the natural world. This is, first, an *ultimate* commitment because it is not derived from any higher norm. The attitude of respect for nature is not grounded on some other, more general, or more fundamental attitude. It sets the total framework for our responsibilities toward the natural world. It can be justified, as I show below, but its justification cannot consist in referring to a more general attitude or a more basic normative principle.

Second, the commitment is a *moral* one because it is understood to be a disinterested matter of principle. It is this feature that distinguishes the attitude of respect for nature from the set of feelings and dispositions that comprise the love of nature. The latter stems from one's personal interest in and response to the natural world. Like the affectionate feelings we have toward certain individual human beings, one's love of nature is nothing more than the particular way one feels about the natural environment and its wild inhabitants. And just as our love for an individual person differs from our respect for all persons as such (whether we happen to love them or not), so love of nature differs from respect for nature. Respect for nature is an attitude we

⁴ I have analyzed the nature of this commitment of human ethics in "On Taking the Moral Point of View," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 3, *Studies in Ethical Theory* (1978), pp. 35-61.

believe all moral agents ought to have simply as moral agents, regardless of whether or not they also love nature. Indeed, we have not truly taken the attitude of respect for nature ourselves unless we believe this. To put it in a Kantian way, to adopt the attitude of respect for nature is to take a stance that one wills it to be a universal law for all rational beings. It is to hold that stance categorically, as being validly applicable to every moral agent without exception, irrespective of whatever personal feelings toward nature such an agent might have or might lack.

Although the attitude of respect for nature is in this sense a disinterested and universalizable attitude, anyone who does adopt it has certain steady, more or less permanent dispositions. These dispositions, which are themselves to be considered disinterested and universalizable, comprise three interlocking sets: dispositions to seek certain ends, dispositions to carry on one's practical reasoning and deliberation in a certain way, and dispositions to have certain feelings. We may accordingly analyze the attitude of respect for nature into the following components. (a) The disposition to aim at, and to take steps to bring about, as final and disinterested ends, the promoting and protecting of the good of organisms, species populations, and life communities in natural ecosystems. (These ends are "final" in not being pursued as means to further ends. They are "disinterested" in being independent of the self-interest of the agent.) (b) The disposition to consider actions that tend to realize those ends to be *prima facie* obligatory *because* they have that tendency. (c) The disposition to experience positive and negative feelings toward states of affairs in the world *because* they are favorable or unfavorable to the good of organisms, species populations, and life communities in natural ecosystems.

The logical connection between the attitude of respect for nature and the duties of a life-centered system of environmental ethics can now be made clear. Insofar as one sincerely takes that attitude and so has the three sets of dispositions, one will at the same time be disposed to comply with certain rules of duty (such as nonmaleficence and noninterference) and with standards of character (such as fairness and benevolence) that determine the obligations and virtues of moral agents with regard to the Earth's wild living things. We can say that the actions one performs and the character traits one develops in fulfilling these moral requirements are the way one *expresses* or *embodies* the attitude in one's conduct and character. In his famous essay, "Justice as Fairness," John Rawls describes the rules of the duties of human morality (such as fidelity, gratitude, honesty, and justice) as "forms of conduct in which recognition of others as persons is manifested."⁵ I hold that the rules of duty governing our treatment of the natural world and its inhabitants are forms of conduct in which the attitude of respect for nature is manifested.

⁵ John Rawls, "Justice As Fairness," *Philosophical Review* 67 (1958): 183.

IV. THE JUSTIFIABILITY OF THE ATTITUDE OF RESPECT FOR NATURE

I return to the question posed earlier, which has not yet been answered: why *should* moral agents regard wild living things as possessing inherent worth? I now argue that the only way we can answer this question is by showing how adopting the attitude of respect for nature is justified for all moral agents. Let us suppose that we were able to establish that there are good reasons for adopting the attitude, reasons which are intersubjectively valid for every rational agent. If there are such reasons, they would justify anyone's having the three sets of dispositions mentioned above as constituting what it means to have the attitude. Since these include the disposition to promote or protect the good of wild living things as a disinterested and ultimate end, as well as the disposition to perform actions for the reason that they tend to realize that end, we see that such dispositions commit a person to the principles of moral consideration and intrinsic value. To be disposed to further, as an end in itself, the good of any entity in nature just because it is that kind of entity, is to be disposed to give consideration to *every* such entity and to place intrinsic value on the realization of its good. Insofar as we subscribe to these two principles we regard living things as possessing inherent worth. Subscribing to the principles is what it *means* to so regard them. To justify the attitude of respect for nature, then, is to justify commitment to these principles and thereby to justify regarding wild creatures as possessing inherent worth.

We must keep in mind that inherent worth is not some mysterious sort of objective property belonging to living things that can be discovered by empirical observation or scientific investigation. To ascribe inherent worth to an entity is not to describe it by citing some feature discernible by sense perception or inferable by inductive reasoning. Nor is there a logically necessary connection between the concept of a being having a good of its own and the concept of inherent worth. We do not contradict ourselves by asserting that an entity that has a good of its own lacks inherent worth. In order to show that such an entity "has" inherent worth we must give good reasons for ascribing that kind of value to it (placing that kind of value upon it, conceiving of it to be valuable in that way). Although it is humans (persons, valuers) who must do the valuing, for the ethics of respect for nature, the value so ascribed is not a human value. That is to say, it is not a value derived from considerations regarding human well-being or human rights. It is a value that is ascribed to nonhuman animals and plants themselves, independently of their relationship to what humans judge to be conducive to their own good.

Whatever reasons, then, justify our taking the attitude of respect for nature as defined above are also reasons that show why we *should* regard the living things of the natural world as possessing inherent worth. We saw earlier that, since the attitude is an ultimate one, it cannot be derived from a more funda-

mental attitude nor shown to be a special case of a more general one. On what sort of grounds, then, can it be established?

The attitude we take toward living things in the natural world depends on the way we look at them, on what kind of beings we conceive them to be, and on how we understand the relations we bear to them. Underlying and supporting our attitude is a certain *belief system* that constitutes a particular world view or outlook on nature and the place of human life in it. To give good reasons for adopting the attitude of respect for nature, then, we must first articulate the belief system which underlies and supports that attitude. If it appears that the belief system is internally coherent and well-ordered, and if, as far as we can now tell, it is consistent with all known scientific truths relevant to our knowledge of the object of the attitude (which in this case includes the whole set of the Earth's natural ecosystems and their communities of life), then there remains the task of indicating why scientifically informed and rational thinkers with a developed capacity of reality awareness can find it acceptable as a way of conceiving of the natural world and our place in it. To the extent we can do this we provide at least a reasonable argument for accepting the belief system and the ultimate moral attitude it supports.

I do not hold that such a belief system can be *proven* to be true, either inductively or deductively. As we shall see, not all of its components can be stated in the form of empirically verifiable propositions. Nor is its internal order governed by purely logical relationships. But the system as a whole, I contend, constitutes a coherent, unified, and rationally acceptable "picture" or "map" of a total world. By examining each of its main components and seeing how they fit together, we obtain a scientifically informed and well-ordered conception of nature and the place of humans in it.

This belief system underlying the attitude of respect for nature I call (for want of a better name) "the biocentric outlook on nature." Since it is not wholly analyzable into empirically confirmable assertions, it should not be thought of as simply a compendium of the biological sciences concerning our planet's ecosystems. It might best be described as a philosophical world view, to distinguish it from a scientific theory or explanatory system. However, one of its major tenets is the great lesson we have learned from the science of ecology: the interdependence of all living things in an organically unified order whose balance and stability are necessary conditions for the realization of the good of its constituent biotic communities.

Before turning to an account of the main components of the biocentric outlook, it is convenient here to set forth the overall structure of my theory of environmental ethics as it has now emerged. The ethics of respect for nature is made up of three basic elements: a belief system, an ultimate moral attitude, and a set of rules of duty and standards of character. These elements are connected with each other in the following manner. The belief system provides a certain outlook on nature which supports and makes intelligible an autono-

mous agent's adopting, as an ultimate moral attitude, the attitude of respect for nature. It supports and makes intelligible the attitude in the sense that, when an autonomous agent understands its moral relations to the natural world in terms of this outlook, it recognizes the attitude of respect to be the only *suitable* or *fitting* attitude to take toward all wild forms of life in the Earth's biosphere. Living things are now viewed as *the appropriate objects of the attitude of respect* and are accordingly regarded as entities possessing inherent worth. One then places intrinsic value on the promotion and protection of their good. As a consequence of this, one makes a moral commitment to abide by a set of rules of duty and to fulfill (as far as one can by one's own efforts) certain standards of good character. Given one's adoption of the attitude of respect, one makes that moral commitment because one considers those rules and standards to be validly binding on all moral agents. They are seen as embodying forms of conduct and character structures in which the attitude of respect for nature is manifested.

This three-part complex which internally orders the ethics of respect for nature is symmetrical with a theory of human ethics grounded on respect for persons. Such a theory includes, first, a conception of oneself and others as persons, that is, as centers of autonomous choice. Second, there is the attitude of respect for persons as persons. When this is adopted as an ultimate moral attitude it involves the disposition to treat every person as having inherent worth or "human dignity." Every human being, just in virtue of her or his humanity, is understood to be worthy of moral consideration, and intrinsic value is placed on the autonomy and well-being of each. This is what Kant meant by conceiving of persons as ends in themselves. Third, there is an ethical system of duties which are acknowledged to be owed by everyone to everyone. These duties are forms of conduct in which public recognition is given to each individual's inherent worth as a person.

This structural framework for a theory of human ethics is meant to leave open the issue of consequentialism (utilitarianism) versus nonconsequentialism (deontology). That issue concerns the particular kind of system of rules defining the duties of moral agents toward persons. Similarly, I am leaving open in this paper the question of what particular kind of system of rules defines our duties with respect to the natural world.

V. THE BIOCENTRIC OUTLOOK ON NATURE

The biocentric outlook on nature has four main components. (1) Humans are thought of as members of the Earth's community of life, holding that membership on the same terms as apply to all the nonhuman members. (2) The Earth's natural ecosystems as a totality are seen as a complex web of interconnected elements, with the sound biological functioning of each being dependent on the sound biological functioning of the others. (This is the component referred to above as the great lesson that the science of ecology has taught us).

(3) Each individual organism is conceived of as a teleological center of life, pursuing its own good in its own way. (4) Whether we are concerned with standards of merit or with the concept of inherent worth, the claim that humans by their very nature are superior to other species is a groundless claim and, in the light of elements (1), (2), and (3) above, must be rejected as nothing more than an irrational bias in our own favor.

The conjunction of these four ideas constitutes the biocentric outlook on nature. In the remainder of this paper I give a brief account of the first three components, followed by a more detailed analysis of the fourth. I then conclude by indicating how this outlook provides a way of justifying the attitude of respect for nature.

VI. HUMANS AS MEMBERS OF THE EARTH'S COMMUNITY OF LIFE

We share with other species a common relationship to the Earth. In accepting the biocentric outlook we take the fact of our being an animal species to be a fundamental feature of our existence. We consider it an essential aspect of "the human condition." We do not deny the differences between ourselves and other species, but we keep in the forefront of our consciousness the fact that in relation to our planet's natural ecosystems we are but one species population among many. Thus we acknowledge our origin in the very same evolutionary process that gave rise to all other species and we recognize ourselves to be confronted with similar environmental challenges to those that confront them. The laws of genetics, of natural selection, and of adaptation apply equally to all of us as biological creatures. In this light we consider ourselves as one with them, not set apart from them. We, as well as they, must face certain basic conditions of existence that impose requirements on us for our survival and well-being. Each animal and plant is like us in having a good of its own. Although our human good (what is of true value in human life, including the exercise of individual autonomy in choosing our own particular value systems) is not like the good of a nonhuman animal or plant, it can no more be realized than their good can without the biological necessities for survival and physical health.

When we look at ourselves from the evolutionary point of view, we see that not only are we very recent arrivals on Earth, but that our emergence as a new species on the planet was originally an event of no particular importance to the entire scheme of things. The Earth was teeming with life long before we appeared. Putting the point metaphorically, we are relative newcomers, entering a home that has been the residence of others for hundreds of millions of years, a home that must now be shared by all of us together.

The comparative brevity of human life on Earth may be vividly depicted by imagining the geological time scale in spatial terms. Suppose we start with algae, which have been around for at least 600 million years. (The earliest

protozoa actually predated this by several *billion* years.) If the time that algae have been here were represented by the length of a football field (300 feet), then the period during which sharks have been swimming in the world's oceans and spiders have been spinning their webs would occupy three quarters of the length of the field; reptiles would show up at about the center of the field; mammals would cover the last third of the field; hominids (mammals of the family *Hominidae*) the last two feet; and the species *Homo sapiens* the last six inches.

Whether this newcomer is able to survive as long as other species remains to be seen. But there is surely something presumptuous about the way humans look down on the "lower" animals, especially those that have become extinct. We consider the dinosaurs, for example, to be biological failures, though they existed on our planet for 65 million years. One writer has made the point with beautiful simplicity:

We sometimes speak of the dinosaurs as failures; there will be time enough for that judgment when we have lasted even for one tenth as long. . . .⁶

The possibility of the extinction of the human species, a possibility which starkly confronts us in the contemporary world, makes us aware of another respect in which we should not consider ourselves privileged beings in relation to other species. This is the fact that the well-being of humans is dependent upon the ecological soundness and health of many plant and animal communities, while their soundness and health does not in the least depend upon human well-being. Indeed, from their standpoint the very existence of humans is quite unnecessary. Every last man, woman, and child could disappear from the face of the Earth without any significant detrimental consequence for the good of wild animals and plants. On the contrary, many of them would be greatly benefited. The destruction of their habitats by human "developments" would cease. The poisoning and polluting of their environment would come to an end. The Earth's land, air, and water would no longer be subject to the degradation they are now undergoing as the result of large-scale technology and uncontrolled population growth. Life communities in natural ecosystems would gradually return to their former healthy state. Tropical forests, for example, would again be able to make their full contribution to a life-sustaining atmosphere for the whole planet. The rivers, lakes, and oceans of the world would (perhaps) eventually become clean again. Spilled oil, plastic trash, and even radioactive waste might finally, after many centuries, cease doing their terrible work. Ecosystems would return to their proper balance, suffering only the disruptions of natural events such as volcanic eruptions and glaciation. From these the community of life could recover, as it has so often done in the past.

⁶ Stephen R.L. Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 112.

But the ecological disasters now perpetrated on it by humans—disasters from which it might never recover—these it would no longer have to endure.

If, then, the total, final, absolute extermination of our species (by our own hands?) should take place and if we should not carry all the others with us into oblivion, not only would the Earth's community of life continue to exist, but in all probability its well-being would be enhanced. Our presence, in short, is not needed. If we were to take the standpoint of the community and give voice to its true interest, the ending of our six-inch epoch would most likely be greeted with a hearty "Good riddance!"

VII. THE NATURAL WORLD AS AN ORGANIC SYSTEM

To accept the biocentric outlook and regard ourselves and our place in the world from its perspective is to see the whole natural order of the Earth's biosphere as a complex but unified web of interconnected organisms, objects, and events. The ecological relationships between any community of living things and their environment form an organic whole of functionally interdependent parts. Each ecosystem is a small universe itself in which the interactions of its various species populations comprise an intricately woven network of cause-effect relations. Such dynamic but at the same time relatively stable structures as food chains, predator-prey relations, and plant succession in a forest are self-regulating, energy-recycling mechanisms that preserve the equilibrium of the whole.

As far as the well-being of wild animals and plants is concerned, this ecological equilibrium must not be destroyed. The same holds true of the well-being of humans. When one views the realm of nature from the perspective of the biocentric outlook, one never forgets that in the long run the integrity of the entire biosphere of our planet is essential to the realization of the good of its constituent communities of life, both human and nonhuman.

Although the importance of this idea cannot be overemphasized, it is by now so familiar and so widely acknowledged that I shall not further elaborate on it here. However, I do wish to point out that this "holistic" view of the Earth's ecological systems does not itself constitute a moral norm. It is a factual aspect of biological reality, to be understood as a set of causal connections in ordinary empirical terms. Its significance for humans is the same as its significance for nonhumans, namely, in setting basic conditions for the realization of the good of living things. Its ethical implications for our treatment of the natural environment lie entirely in the fact that our *knowledge* of these causal connections is an essential *means* to fulfilling the aims we set for ourselves in adopting the attitude of respect for nature. In addition, its theoretical implications for the ethics of respect for nature lie in the fact that it (along with the other elements of the biocentric outlook) makes the adopting of that attitude a rational and intelligible thing to do.

VIII. INDIVIDUAL ORGANISMS AS TELEOLOGICAL CENTERS OF LIFE

As our knowledge of living things increases, as we come to a deeper understanding of their life cycles, their interactions with other organisms, and the manifold ways in which they adjust to the environment, we become more fully aware of how each of them is carrying out its biological functions according to the laws of its species-specific nature. But besides this, our increasing knowledge and understanding also develop in us a sharpened awareness of the uniqueness of each individual organism. Scientists who have made careful studies of particular plants and animals, whether in the field or in laboratories, have often acquired a knowledge of their subjects as identifiable individuals. Close observation over extended periods of time has led them to an appreciation of the unique "personalities" of their subjects. Sometimes a scientist may come to take a special interest in a particular animal or plant, all the while remaining strictly objective in the gathering and recording of data. Nonscientists may likewise experience this development of interest when, as amateur naturalists, they make accurate observations over sustained periods of close acquaintance with an individual organism. As one becomes more and more familiar with the organism and its behavior, one becomes fully sensitive to the particular way it is living out its life cycle. One may become fascinated by it and even experience some involvement with its good and bad fortunes (that is, with the occurrence of environmental conditions favorable or unfavorable to the realization of its good). The organism comes to mean something to one as a unique, irreplaceable individual. The final culmination of this process is the achievement of a genuine understanding of its point of view and, with that understanding, an ability to "take" that point of view. *Conceiving of it as a center of life, one is able to look at the world from its perspective.*

This development from objective knowledge to the recognition of individuality, and from the recognition of individuality to full awareness of an organism's standpoint, is a process of heightening our consciousness of what it means to be an individual living thing. We grasp the particularity of the organism as a teleological center of life, striving to preserve itself and to realize its own good in its own unique way.

It is to be noted that we need not be falsely anthropomorphizing when we conceive of individual plants and animals in this manner. Understanding them as teleological centers of life does not necessitate "reading into" them human characteristics. We need not, for example, consider them to have consciousness. Some of them may be aware of the world around them and others may not. Nor need we deny that different kinds and levels of awareness are exemplified when consciousness in some form is present. But conscious or not, all are equally teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unified system of goal-oriented activities directed toward their preservation and well-being.

When considered from an ethical point of view, a teleological center of life is an entity whose "world" can be viewed from the perspective of *its* life. In looking at the world from that perspective we recognize objects and events occurring in its life as being beneficent, maleficent, or indifferent. The first are occurrences which increase its powers to preserve its existence and realize its good. The second decrease or destroy those powers. The third have neither of these effects on the entity. With regard to our human role as moral agents, we can conceive of a teleological center of life as a being whose standpoint we can take in making judgments about what events in the world are good or evil, desirable or undesirable. In making those judgments it is what promotes or protects the being's own good, not what benefits moral agents themselves, that sets the standard of evaluation. Such judgments can be made about anything that happens to the entity which is favorable or unfavorable in relation to its good. As was pointed out earlier, the entity itself need not have any (conscious) *interest* in what is happening to it for such judgments to be meaningful and true.

It is precisely judgments of this sort that we are disposed to make when we take the attitude of respect for nature. In adopting that attitude those judgments are given weight as reasons for action in our practical deliberation. They become morally relevant facts in the guidance of our conduct.

IX. THE DENIAL OF HUMAN SUPERIORITY

This fourth component of the biocentric outlook on nature is the single most important idea in establishing the justifiability of the attitude of respect for nature. Its central role is due to the special relationship it bears to the first three components of the outlook. This relationship will be brought out after the concept of human superiority is examined and analyzed.⁷

In what sense are humans alleged to be superior to other animals? We are different from them in having certain capacities that they lack. But why should these capacities be a mark of superiority? From what point of view are they judged to be signs of superiority and what sense of superiority is meant? After all, various nonhuman species have capacities that humans lack. There is the speed of a cheetah, the vision of an eagle, the agility of a monkey. Why should not these be taken as signs of *their* superiority over humans?

One answer that comes immediately to mind is that these capacities are not as *valuable* as the human capacities that are claimed to make us superior. Such uniquely human characteristics as rational thought, aesthetic creativity, auton-

⁷ My criticisms of the dogma of human superiority gain independent support from a carefully reasoned essay by R. and V. Routley showing the many logical weaknesses in arguments for human-centered theories of environmental ethics. R. and V. Routley, "Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism," in K. E. Goodpaster and K. M. Sayre, eds., *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 36-59.

omy and self-determination, and moral freedom, it might be held, have a higher value than the capacities found in other species. Yet we must ask: valuable to whom, and on what grounds?

The human characteristics mentioned are all valuable to humans. They are essential to the preservation and enrichment of our civilization and culture. Clearly it is from the human standpoint that they are being judged to be desirable and good. It is not difficult here to recognize a begging of the question. Humans are claiming human superiority from a strictly human point of view, that is, from a point of view in which the good of humans is taken as the standard of judgment. All we need to do is to look at the capacities of nonhuman animals (or plants, for that matter) from the standpoint of *their* good to find a contrary judgment of superiority. The speed of the cheetah, for example, is a sign of its superiority to humans when considered from the standpoint of the good of its species. If it were as slow a runner as a human, it would not be able to survive. And so for all the other abilities of nonhumans which further their good but which are lacking in humans. In each case the claim to human superiority would be rejected from a nonhuman standpoint.

When superiority assertions are interpreted in this way, they are based on judgments of *merit*. To judge the merits of a person or an organism one must apply grading or ranking standards to it. (As I show below, this distinguishes judgments of merit from judgments of inherent worth.) Empirical investigation then determines whether it has the "good-making properties" (merits) in virtue of which it fulfills the standards being applied. In the case of humans, merits may be either moral or nonmoral. We can judge one person to be better than (superior to) another from the moral point of view by applying certain standards to their character and conduct. Similarly, we can appeal to nonmoral criteria in judging someone to be an excellent piano player, a fair cook, a poor tennis player, and so on. Different social purposes and roles are implicit in the making of such judgments, providing the frame of reference for the choice of standards by which the nonmoral merits of people are determined. Ultimately such purposes and roles stem from a society's way of life as a whole. Now a society's way of life may be thought of as the cultural form given to the realization of human values. Whether moral or nonmoral standards are being applied, then, all judgments of people's merits finally depend on human values. All are made from an exclusively human standpoint.

The question that naturally arises at this juncture is: why should standards that are based on human values be assumed to be the only valid criteria of merit and hence the only true signs of superiority? This question is especially pressing when humans are being judged superior in merit to nonhumans. It is true that a human being may be a better mathematician than a monkey, but the monkey may be a better tree climber than a human being. If we humans value mathematics more than tree climbing, that is because our conception of civilized life makes the development of mathematical ability more desirable than the ability to climb trees. But is it not unreasonable to judge nonhumans by

the values of human civilization, rather than by values connected with what it is for a member of *that* species to live a good life? If all living things have a good of their own, it at least makes sense to judge the merits of nonhumans by standards derived from *their* good. To use only standards based on human values is already to commit oneself to holding that humans are superior to nonhumans, which is the point in question.

A further logical flaw arises in connection with the widely held conviction that humans are *morally* superior beings because they possess, while others lack, the capacities of a moral agent (free will, accountability, deliberation, judgment, practical reason). This view rests on a conceptual confusion. As far as moral standards are concerned, only beings that have the capacities of a moral agent can properly be judged to be *either* moral (morally good) *or* immoral (morally deficient). Moral standards are simply not applicable to beings that lack such capacities. Animals and plants cannot therefore be said to be morally inferior in merit to humans. Since the only beings that can have moral merits *or be deficient in such merits* are moral agents, it is conceptually incoherent to judge humans as superior to nonhumans on the ground that humans have moral capacities while nonhumans don't.

Up to this point I have been interpreting the claim that humans are superior to other living things as a grading or ranking judgment regarding their comparative merits. There is, however, another way of understanding the idea of human superiority. According to this interpretation, humans are superior to nonhumans not as regards their merits but as regards their inherent worth. Thus the claim of human superiority is to be understood as asserting that all humans, simply in virtue of their humanity, have a *greater inherent worth* than other living things.

The inherent worth of an entity does not depend on its merits.⁸ To consider something as possessing inherent worth, we have seen, is to place intrinsic value on the realization of its good. This is done regardless of whatever particular merits it might have or might lack, as judged by a set of grading or ranking standards. In human affairs, we are all familiar with the principle that one's worth as a person does not vary with one's merits or lack of merits. The same can hold true of animals and plants. To regard such entities as possessing inherent worth entails disregarding their merits and deficiencies, whether they are being judged from a human standpoint or from the standpoint of their own species.

The idea of one entity having more merit than another, and so being superior to it in merit, makes perfectly good sense. Merit is a grading or ranking concept, and judgments of comparative merit are based on the different degrees to which things satisfy a given standard. But what can it mean to talk about one thing being superior to another in inherent worth? In order to get at what

⁸ For this way of distinguishing between merit and inherent worth, I am indebted to Gregory Vlastos, "Justice and Equality," in R. Brandt, ed., *Social Justice* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 31-72.

is being asserted in such a claim it is helpful first to look at the social origin of the concept of degrees of inherent worth.

The idea that humans can possess different degrees of inherent worth originated in societies having rigid class structures. Before the rise of modern democracies with their egalitarian outlook, one's membership in a hereditary class determined one's social status. People in the upper classes were looked up to, while those in the lower classes were looked down upon. In such a society one's social superiors and social inferiors were clearly defined and easily recognized.

Two aspects of these class-structured societies are especially relevant to the idea of degrees of inherent worth. First, those born into the upper classes were deemed more worthy of respect than those born into the lower orders. Second, the superior worth of upper class people had nothing to do with their merits nor did the inferior worth of those in the lower classes rest on their lack of merits. One's superiority or inferiority entirely derived from a social position one was born into. The modern concept of a meritocracy simply did not apply. One could not advance into a higher class by any sort of moral or nonmoral achievement. Similarly, an aristocrat held his title and all the privileges that went with it just because he was the eldest son of a titled nobleman. Unlike the bestowing of knighthood in contemporary Great Britain, one did not earn membership in the nobility by meritorious conduct.

We who live in modern democracies no longer believe in such hereditary social distinctions. Indeed, we would wholeheartedly condemn them on moral grounds as being fundamentally unjust. We have come to think of class systems as a paradigm of social injustice, it being a central principle of the democratic way of life that among humans there are no superiors and no inferiors. Thus we have rejected the whole conceptual framework in which people are judged to have different degrees of inherent worth. That idea is incompatible with our notion of human equality based on the doctrine that all humans, simply in virtue of their humanity, have the same inherent worth. (The belief in universal human rights is one form that this egalitarianism takes.)

The vast majority of people in modern democracies, however, do not maintain an egalitarian outlook when it comes to comparing human beings with other living things. Most people consider our own species to be superior to all other species and this superiority is understood to be a matter of inherent worth, not merit. There may exist thoroughly vicious and depraved humans who lack all merit. Yet because they are human they are thought to belong to a higher class of entities than any plant or animal. That one is born into the species *Homo sapiens* entitles one to have lordship over those who are one's inferiors, namely, those born into other species. The parallel with hereditary social classes is very close. Implicit in this view is a hierarchical conception of nature according to which an organism has a position of superiority or inferiority in the Earth's community of life simply on the basis of its genetic

background. The "lower" orders of life are looked down upon and it is considered perfectly proper that they serve the interests of those belonging to the highest order, namely humans. The intrinsic value we place on the well-being of our fellow humans reflects our recognition of their rightful position as our equals. No such intrinsic value is to be placed on the good of other animals, unless we choose to do so out of fondness or affection for them. But their well-being imposes no moral requirement on us. In this respect there is an absolute difference in moral status between ourselves and them.

This is the structure of concepts and beliefs that people are committed to insofar as they regard humans to be superior in inherent worth to all other species. I now wish to argue that this structure of concepts and beliefs is completely groundless. If we accept the first three components of the biocentric outlook and from that perspective look at the major philosophical traditions which have supported that structure, we find it to be at bottom nothing more than the expression of an irrational bias in our own favor. The philosophical traditions themselves rest on very questionable assumptions or else simply beg the question. I briefly consider three of the main traditions to substantiate the point. These are classical Greek humanism, Cartesian dualism, and the Judeo-Christian concept of the Great Chain of Being.

The inherent superiority of humans over other species was implicit in the Greek definition of man as a rational animal. Our animal nature was identified with "brute" desires that need the order and restraint of reason to rule them (just as reason is the special virtue of those who rule in the ideal state). Rationality was then seen to be the key to our superiority over animals. It enables us to live on a higher plane and endows us with a nobility and worth that other creatures lack. This familiar way of comparing humans with other species is deeply ingrained in our Western philosophical outlook. The point to consider here is that this view does not actually provide an argument *for* human superiority but rather makes explicit the framework of thought that is implicitly used by those who think of humans as inherently superior to nonhumans. The Greeks who held that humans, in virtue of their rational capacities, have a kind of worth greater than that of any nonrational being, never looked at rationality as but one capacity of living things among many others. But when we consider rationality from the standpoint of the first three elements of the ecological outlook, we see that its value lies in its importance for *human* life. Other creatures achieve their species-specific good without the need of rationality, although they often make use of capacities that humans lack. So the humanistic outlook of classical Greek thought does not give us a neutral (nonquestion-begging) ground on which to construct a scale of degrees of inherent worth possessed by different species of living things.

The second tradition, centering on the Cartesian dualism of soul and body, also fails to justify the claim to human superiority. That superiority is supposed to derive from the fact that we have souls while animals do not. Animals are

mere automata and lack the divine element that makes us spiritual beings. I won't go into the now familiar criticisms of this two-substance view. I only add the point that, even if humans are composed of an immaterial, unextended soul and a material, extended body, this in itself is not a reason to deem them of greater worth than entities that are only bodies. Why is a soul substance a thing that adds value to its possessor? Unless some theological reasoning is offered here (which many, including myself, would find unacceptable on epistemological grounds), no logical connection is evident. An immaterial something which thinks is better than a material something which does not think only if thinking itself has value, either intrinsically or instrumentally. Now it is intrinsically valuable to humans alone, who value it as an end in itself, and it is instrumentally valuable to those who benefit from it, namely humans.

For animals that neither enjoy thinking for its own sake nor need it for living the kind of life for which they are best adapted, it has no value. Even if "thinking" is broadened to include all forms of consciousness, there are still many living things that can do without it and yet live what is for their species a good life. The anthropocentricity underlying the claim to human superiority runs throughout Cartesian dualism.

A third major source of the idea of human superiority is the Judeo-Christian concept of the Great Chain of Being. Humans are superior to animals and plants because their Creator has given them a higher place on the chain. It begins with God at the top, and then moves to the angels, who are lower than God but higher than humans, then to humans, positioned between the angels and the beasts (partaking of the nature of both), and then on down to the lower levels occupied by nonhuman animals, plants, and finally inanimate objects. Humans, being "made in God's image," are inherently superior to animals and plants by virtue of their being closer (in their essential nature) to God.

The metaphysical and epistemological difficulties with this conception of a hierarchy of entities are, in my mind, insuperable. Without entering into this matter here, I only point out that if we are unwilling to accept the metaphysics of traditional Judaism and Christianity, we are again left without good reasons for holding to the claim of inherent human superiority.

The foregoing considerations (and others like them) leave us with but one ground for the assertion that a human being, regardless of merit, is a higher kind of entity than any other living thing. This is the mere fact of the genetic makeup of the species *Homo sapiens*. But this is surely irrational and arbitrary. Why should the arrangement of genes of a certain type be a mark of superior value, especially when this fact about an organism is taken by itself, unrelated to any other aspect of its life? We might just as well refer to any other genetic makeup as a ground of superior value. Clearly we are confronted here with a wholly arbitrary claim that can only be explained as an irrational bias in our own favor.

That the claim is nothing more than a deep-seated prejudice is brought home to us when we look at our relation to other species in the light of the first three

elements of the biocentric outlook. Those elements taken conjointly give us a certain overall view of the natural world and of the place of humans in it. When we take this view we come to understand other living things, their environmental conditions, and their ecological relationships in such a way as to awake in us a deep sense of our kinship with them as fellow members of the Earth's community of life. Humans and nonhumans alike are viewed together as integral parts of one unified whole in which all living things are functionally interrelated. Finally, when our awareness focuses on the individual lives of plants and animals, each is seen to share with us the characteristic of being a teleological center of life striving to realize its own good in its own unique way.

As this entire belief system becomes part of the conceptual framework through which we understand and perceive the world, we come to see ourselves as bearing a certain moral relation to nonhuman forms of life. Our ethical role in nature takes on a new significance. We begin to look at other species as we look at ourselves, seeing them as beings which have a good they are striving to realize just as we have a good we are striving to realize. We accordingly develop the disposition to view the world from the standpoint of their good as well as from the standpoint of our own good. Now if the groundlessness of the claim that humans are inherently superior to other species were brought clearly before our minds, we would not remain intellectually neutral toward that claim but would reject it as being fundamentally at variance with our total world outlook. In the absence of any good reasons for holding it, the assertion of human superiority would then appear simply as the expression of an irrational and self-serving prejudice that favors one particular species over several million others.

Rejecting the notion of human superiority entails its positive counterpart: the doctrine of species impartiality. One who accepts that doctrine regards all living things as possessing inherent worth—the *same* inherent worth, since no one species has been shown to be either “higher” or “lower” than any other. Now we saw earlier that, insofar as one thinks of a living thing as possessing inherent worth, one considers it to be the appropriate object of the attitude of respect and believes that attitude to be the only fitting or suitable one for all moral agents to take toward it.

Here, then, is the key to understanding how the attitude of respect is rooted in the biocentric outlook on nature. The basic connection is made through the denial of human superiority. Once we reject the claim that humans are superior either in merit or in worth to other living things, we are ready to adopt the attitude of respect. The denial of human superiority is itself the result of taking the perspective on nature built into the first three elements of the biocentric outlook.

Now the first three elements of the biocentric outlook, it seems clear, would be found acceptable to any rational and scientifically informed thinker who is fully “open” to the reality of the lives of nonhuman organisms. Without

denying our distinctively human characteristics, such a thinker can acknowledge the fundamental respects in which we are members of the Earth's community of life and in which the biological conditions necessary for the realization of our human values are inextricably linked with the whole system of nature. In addition, the conception of individual living things as teleological centers of life simply articulates how a scientifically informed thinker comes to understand them as the result of increasingly careful and detailed observations. Thus, the biocentric outlook recommends itself as an acceptable system of concepts and beliefs to anyone who is clear-minded, unbiased, and factually enlightened, and who has a developed capacity of reality awareness with regard to the lives of individual organisms. This, I submit, is as good a reason for making the moral commitment involved in adopting the attitude of respect for nature as any theory of environmental ethics could possibly have.

X. MORAL RIGHTS AND THE MATTER OF COMPETING CLAIMS

I have not asserted anywhere in the foregoing account that animals or plants have moral rights. This omission was deliberate. I do not think that the reference class of the concept, bearer of moral rights, should be extended to include nonhuman living things. My reasons for taking this position, however, go beyond the scope of this paper. I believe I have been able to accomplish many of the same ends which those who ascribe rights to animals or plants wish to accomplish. There is no reason, moreover, why plants and animals, including whole species populations and life communities, cannot be accorded *legal* rights under my theory. To grant them legal protection could be interpreted as giving them legal entitlement to be protected, and this, in fact, would be a means by which a society that subscribed to the ethics of respect for nature could give public recognition to their inherent worth.

There remains the problem of competing claims, even when wild plants and animals are not thought of as bearers of moral rights. If we accept the biocentric outlook and accordingly adopt the attitude of respect for nature as our ultimate moral attitude, how do we resolve conflicts that arise from our respect for persons in the domain of human ethics and our respect for nature in the domain of environmental ethics? This is a question that cannot adequately be dealt with here. My main purpose in this paper has been to try to establish a base point from which we can start working toward a solution to the problem. I have shown why we cannot just begin with an initial presumption in favor of the interests of our own species. It is after all within our power as moral beings to place limits on human population and technology with the deliberate intention of sharing the Earth's bounty with other species. That such sharing is an ideal difficult to realize even in an approximate way does not take away its claim to our deepest moral commitment.

[17]

The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic

Tom Regan*

A conception of an environmental ethic is set forth which involves postulating that nonconscious natural objects can have value in their own right, independently of human interests. Two kinds of objection are considered: (1) those that deny the possibility (the intelligibility) of developing an ethic of the environment that accepts this postulate, and (2) those that deny the necessity of constructing such an ethic. Both types of objection are found wanting. The essay concludes with some tentative remarks regarding the notion of inherent value.

I. INTRODUCTION

Is an environmental ethic possible? Answers to this question presuppose that we have an agreed upon understanding of the nature of an environmental ethic. Evidently we do not, and one fundamental problem for this burgeoning area of ethics is to say what such an ethic must be like. In the present essay, I characterize and defend, although incompletely, a particular conception of an environmental ethic. My modest objective is to show that there is something worth thinking about completing.

II. TWO CONDITIONS OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

The conception I favor accepts the following two conditions:

- (1) An environmental ethic must hold that there are nonhuman beings which have moral standing.¹

*Department of Philosophy and Religion, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27607. Regan has written extensively on the topic of animal rights. He has recently edited a collection of specially commissioned essays, *Matters of Life and Death: New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1980). Another collection, coedited with Donald Van De Veer, *Individual Rights and Public Policy* (Rowman and Littlefield) is scheduled to appear later this year.

¹ By the expression *moral standing* I mean the following: *X* has moral standing if and only if *X* is a being such that we morally ought to determine how *X* will be affected in the course of determining whether we ought to perform a given act or adopt a given policy. In the present essay the question of whether beings having moral standing have rights can be regarded as an open question, though in my view they do. See my "An Examination and Defense of One Argument Concerning Animal Rights," *Inquiry* 22(1979): 189-219. See also in this regard Kenneth Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable," *Journal of Philosophy* 75(1978): 308-25. Though the class of nonconscious beings includes artifacts and works of art, I normally have natural objects or collections of such objects in mind. For stylistic reasons I sometimes use the more general

- (2) An environmental ethic must hold that the class of those beings which have moral standing includes but is larger than the class of conscious beings—that is, all conscious beings and some nonconscious beings must be held to have moral standing.

If both conditions are accepted, then a theory that satisfies neither of them is not a false environmental ethic; it is not an environmental ethic at all. Any theory that satisfies (1), but does not satisfy (2) might be regarded as a theory “on the way to becoming” such an ethic, in that it satisfies a necessary condition, but, since it fails to satisfy condition (2), it fails to qualify as a genuine environmental ethic. Only theories that satisfy (2), on the conception advanced here, can properly be regarded as environmental ethics, whether true, reasonable, or otherwise.

Though only a necessary condition, (1) assists us in distinguishing between (a) an ethic *of* the environment, and (b) an ethic *for the use* of the environment. Suppose we think that only the interests of human beings matter morally. Then it certainly would be possible to develop a homocentric ethic for the use of the environment. Roughly speaking, such an ethic would declare that the environment ought to be used so that the quality of human life, including possibly that of future generations, ought to be enhanced. I do not say developing such an ethic (what I shall call “a management ethic”) would be simple or unimportant, but a management ethic falls short of an ethic of the environment, given the conditions stated earlier. It restricts the loci of value to the lives and interests of *human* beings, whereas an environmental ethic requires that we recognize the moral standing of nonhumans.

L. W. Sumner advances considerations which, if accepted, would lead us to an ethical theory that satisfies condition (1) and thereby takes us beyond a management ethic.² Sumner argues that the lives and interests of nonhuman animals, not just those of human beings, ought to be taken into account in their own right. Recognition of this fact, he states, marks “the beginning of a genuine environmental consciousness.”³ Other thinkers have advanced similar arguments.⁴ Despite many differences, these thinkers share the belief that only *conscious* beings can have moral standing. I shall refer to theories that embody

expression, *nonconscious objects*, and sometimes the more specific, *natural objects* or “collections of natural objects.” Also for stylistic reasons I speak interchangeably of “our duties in regard to nature,” “in regard to the environment,” or “in regard to natural objects or collections of natural objects.” I trust that no grievous conceptual errors or partisan causes will be found lodged in my taking this liberty with language.

² L. S. Sumner, “A Matter of Life and Death,” *Nous* 10 (1976): 145–71.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁴ See in particular Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1975) and Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rights* (London: SCM Press, 1976). For a critical assessment of this position as it is related to the topic of animal rights, see my essay “Examination and Defense,” noted above.

this belief as *kinship theories* because they grow out of the idea that beings resembling humans in the quite fundamental way of being conscious, and thus to this extent kin to us, have moral standing. I shall have more to say about kinship theories below (section 4).

Management and kinship theories are clearly distinct. Management theories direct us, for example, to preserve wildlife if this is in the interest of human beings, including (possibly) the interest of generations yet unborn. Animals in the wild are not themselves recognized as having interests or value that ought to be taken into account. Given a kinship ethic, however, wild animals, in their own right, figure in the moral arithmetic, though precisely how we are to carry out the required computations is unclear. When, for example, there is a clash between the preservation of wild animals and the economic development of the wilderness, it is unclear how conflicting interests are to be weighed. The value of survival of how many caribou, for example, equals the disvalue of how much financial loss to oil investors in Northern Canada?

Whatever difficulties may exist for management or kinship theories in weighing conflicting claims, however, these difficulties seem to be compounded if we move beyond these theories to ones that meet condition (2), for then we are required, it appears, to deal with the possibility that human and animal interests might come into conflict with the survival or flourishing of nonconscious beings, and it is extremely doubtful whether such conflicts can *in principle* admit of rational adjudication.

I do not wish to minimize the difficulties that attend the development of an environmental ethic which is consequentialist in nature (e.g., some form of utilitarianism). There are difficulties of comparison, perhaps themselves great enough to foreclose the possibility of developing a consequentialist environmental ethic. I shall have more to say on this matter as we proceed. First, though, a more fundamental problem requires our attention. Is it even logically possible for a theory to meet both the conditions I have recommended for an environmental ethic? The answer clearly is no if compelling reasons can be given for limiting moral standing *only* to conscious beings. In the following section I reject three arguments that attempt to establish this restriction.

III. ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

The first argument to be considered I call the "interest argument":

- (1) The only beings which can have moral standing are those beings which can have interests.
- (2) The only beings which can have interests are those which have the capacity for consciousness.

- (3) Therefore, the only beings which can have moral standing are beings having the capacity for consciousness.

Now, this argument, as I have argued elsewhere against a similar argument,⁵ has apparent plausibility because it exploits an ambiguity in the concept of something having interests. To speak of *A*'s interests in *X* might mean either (a) that *A* is interested in (wants, desires, hopes for, cares about, etc.) *X*, or (b) that *X* is in *A*'s interest (that *X* will contribute to *A*'s good, or well-being, or welfare). Clearly if the only beings which can have moral standing are those which can be interested in things (have desires, wants, etc.), then only conscious beings can have moral standing. The idea of nonconscious beings having desires, wants, etc., at least in any literal sense, seems plainly unintelligible. If, on the other hand, we mean beings which can be benefited or harmed by what is given or denied them, then it is an open question whether the class of beings which can have moral standing is coextensive with the class of beings having the capacity for consciousness. Perhaps other beings can have a good or value that can be advanced or retarded depending on what is done to them. The interest argument provides us with no resolution of this question, and so fails to demonstrate the impossibility of an environmental ethic.

A second argument, which I shall call the "sentience argument," closely resembles the interest argument and is vulnerable to the same type of objection:⁶

- (1) The only beings which can have moral standing are those which are sentient.
- (2) The only beings which are sentient are those which have the capacity for consciousness.
- (3) Therefore, the only beings which can have moral standing are those which have the capacity for consciousness.

I shall limit my critical remarks to step (1). How might it be supported? First, one might argue that only sentient beings have interests; that is, one might seek to support the sentience argument by invoking the interest argument, but since we have shown this latter argument is incomplete, at best, this defense of the sentience argument must bear the same diagnosis. A second defense consists

⁵ See my article "Feinberg on What Sorts of Beings Can Have Rights," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 14 (1976): 485-98, and "McCloskey on Why Animals Cannot Have Rights," *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1976): 251-57. For a defense of McCloskey's position, see R. G. Frey, "Interests and Animal Rights," *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977): 254-59. But see also my reply to Frey, "Frey On Interests and Animal Rights," *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977): 335-37. The occasion for this exchange is McCloskey's important essay, "Rights," *Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1965): 115-27.

⁶ Singer in *Animal Liberation* would seem to be committed to this position. See especially pp. 8-9.

in claiming that it is "meaningless"⁷ to think that nonconscious beings possibly have moral standing. This is unconvincing. *If* it is meaningless, there ought to be some way of illuminating why this is so, and this illumination is not provided by the mere charge of meaninglessness itself. Such a defense has more the aura of rhetoric than of philosophy.

A third defense consists in arguing that the only beings having moral standing are those having value in their own right, *and* that only sentient beings have value of this kind. This defense, as I argue in a moment, is a token of the argument type I call the "goodness argument." Its major liability is that by itself it provides no justification for its two central claims—namely, (a) that only beings which can have value in their own right can have moral standing, and (b) that only sentient beings have value in their own right. For reasons to which I come below, I believe (b) is false while (a) is true. Meanwhile, neither is self-evident and so each stands in need of rational defense, something not provided by the sentience argument itself.

The final argument to be considered is the goodness argument:

- (1) The only beings which can have moral standing are those which can have a good of their own.
- (2) The only beings which can have a good of their own are those capable of consciousness.
- (3) Therefore, the only beings which can have moral standing are those capable of consciousness.

Premise (1) of the goodness argument seems to identify a fundamental presupposition of an environmental ethic. The importance of this premise is brought out when we ask for the grounds on which we might rest the obligation to preserve any existing *X*. Fundamentally, two types of answer are possible. First, preserving *X* is necessary to bring about future good or prevent future evil for beings other than *X*; on this account *X*'s existence has instrumental value. Second, the obligation we have might be to *X* itself, independently of *X*'s instrumental value, because *X* has a good or value in its own right. Given our conditions for an environmental ethic, not all of the values recognized in nonconscious nature can be instrumental. Only if we agree with premise (1) of the goodness argument, therefore, can we have a necessary presupposition of an environmental ethic. How inherent goodness or value can be intelligibly ascribed to nonconscious beings is a difficult question, one we shall return to later (section 5). At present, we must consider the remainder of the goodness argument, since if sound, it rules out the logical possibility of nonconscious beings having a good or value of their own.

"The only beings which have a good of their own," premise (2) states, "are those capable of consciousness." What arguments can be given to support this

⁷ Singer, p. 8.

view? I have examined suggested answers elsewhere at length.⁸ What these arguments come to in the end, if I am right, is the thesis that consciousness is a logically necessary condition of having only *a certain kind* of good of one's own, happiness. Thus, though we may speak, metaphorically of a "happy azalea" or a "contented broccoli," the only sorts of beings which literally can have happiness are conscious beings. There is no disputing this. What is disputable is the tacit assumption that this is the *only* kind of good or value a given *X* can have in its own right. Unless or until a compelling supporting argument is supplied, for limiting inherent goodness to happiness, the goodness argument falls short of limiting moral standing to just those beings capable of consciousness.

Four truths result if the argument of the present section is sound. First, an environmental ethic must recognize that the class of beings having moral standing is larger than the class of conscious beings. Second, the basis on which an environmental ethic must pin this enlargement is the idea that nonconscious beings can have a good or value in their own right. Third, though it remains to be ascertained what this goodness or value is, it is not happiness; and fourth, efforts to show that nonconscious beings cannot have moral standing fail to show this. The conclusion we guardedly reach, then, is that the impossibility of an environmental ethic has not been shown.

IV. ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE NECESSITY OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

We turn now to a second series of objections against an environmental ethic, all of which concede that it is *possible* that nonconscious beings may have value in themselves, and thus that it is *possible* to develop an environmental ethic, but which all deny, nonetheless, that there are good enough reasons for holding that nonconscious beings *do* have a good or value in their own right. There are, these objections hold in common, alternative ways of accounting for the moral dimensions of our relationship to the environmental which are rationally preferable to postulating inherent value in it. Thus, while granting the possibility of an environmental ethic, the four views about to be considered deny its necessity.

THE CORRUPTION OF CHARACTER ARGUMENT

Advocates of this argument insist that it is wrong to treat nonconscious nature in certain ways—e.g., unchecked strip mining—but account for this by urging that people who engage in such activities tend to become similarly ruthless in their dealings with people. Just as Kant speculated that those who

⁸ See my critical essay on Feinberg, footnote 9. But see also my discussion of inherent goodness in section 3 below.

act cruelly to animals develop the habit of cruelty, and so are likely to be cruel to their fellow man,⁹ so similarly those who indiscriminately destroy the natural environment will develop destructive habits that will in time wreak havoc on their neighbor. Our duties to act toward the environment in certain ways are thus explained without our having to postulate value *in* the environment.

This argument cannot be any stronger than its central empirical thesis that those who treat the environment in certain ways will be inclined to treat their fellow humans in analogous ways. I do not believe there is any hard empirical evidence at hand which supports this hypothesis. Comparing the crime rates of strip miners and accountants would probably provide a good deal of hard empirical data against it. Indeed, one cannot help wondering if the very reverse habits might not be fostered by instructing persons to do anything they want to the environment, if no person is harmed, while insisting on strict prohibitions in our dealings with persons. There would appear to be just as much (or just as little) empirical data to support this hypothesis as there is to support the hypothesis central to the corruption of character argument. On empirical grounds, the argument lacks credibility.

THE OFFENSE AGAINST AN IDEAL ARGUMENT

This argument differs from the corruption of character argument in that it does not rest its case on an unsupported empirical claim. The argument alleges, quite apart from how those who treat nature end up treating other humans, that those persons who plunder the environment violate an ideal of human conduct, that ideal being not to destroy anything unthinkingly or gratuitously. This argument is open to a fatal objection. It would be an eccentric ideal which, on the one hand, enjoined those who would fulfill it to act in a certain way or to become a certain kind of person, and, on the other hand, held that there was no value in acting in those ways or in being that kind of person. For example, acting with integrity or becoming a compassionate person are intelligible human ideals, but part at least of what makes them intelligible is the implicit judgment that integrity and compassion are fitting ways to behave. However, the fitting way to act in regard to *X* clearly involves a commitment to regarding *X* as having value. Honesty is an ideal, not simply because I am a good person if honest, but also because honesty is a fitting way *to act toward* beings possessed of a certain kind of value—e.g., autonomy. An ideal which enjoins us not to act toward *X* in a certain way but which denies that *X* has any value is either unintelligible or pointless. Ideals, in short, involve the recognition of the value of *that toward which* one acts. If we are told that

⁹ Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, "Duties to Animals and Spirits." Relevant portions are reprinted in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, ed. Tom Regan and Peter Singer (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 122–23.

treating the environment in certain ways offends against an ideal of human conduct we are not being given a position that is an alternative to, or inconsistent with, the view that nonconscious objects have a value of their own. The fatal objection which the offense against an ideal argument encounters, is that, rather than offering an alternative to the view that some nonconscious objects have inherent value, it presupposes that they do.

THE UTILITARIAN ARGUMENT

To speak of *the* utilitarian argument is misleading. A wide variety of utilitarian argument is possible, even including positions which hold that some nonconscious beings do have value in their own right.¹⁰ I shall restrict my attention to forms of utilitarianism that deny this, focusing mainly on hedonistic utilitarianism.¹¹

Abstractly and roughly, hedonistic utilitarianism holds that an action is right if no alternative action produces a better balance of pleasure over pain for all those affected. A theory of this type is "on the way to becoming" an environmental ethic if, as utilitarians since Bentham have argued, animals are sentient, and thus, given the utilitarian criteria, have moral standing. But hedonistic utilitarianism fails to satisfy the second condition of an environmental ethic and thus fails to qualify as an ethic of the environment. Its shortcomings are highlighted by asking, "Why not plastic trees? Why not lawns of astro-turf, or mountains of papier-mâché suitably coated with vinyl to withstand harsh weather?" Stories find their way almost daily into the popular press which illustrate that a plastic environment is increasingly within the reach of modern technology. If, as Martin Krieger argues, "the demand for rare environments is a learned one," then "conscious public choice can manipulate this learning so that the environments which people learn to use and want reflect environments which are likely to be available at low cost."¹² Thus, as Mark Sagoff sees it, "This is the reason that the redwoods are (given Krieger's position) replaceable by plastic trees."¹³ "The advertising that created rare environments," Krieger writes, "can create plentiful (e.g., plastic) substitutes."¹⁴

A hedonistic utilitarianism cannot quarrel over the *source* of environmentally based pleasures, whether they arise from real stands of redwoods or plastic replicas. Provided only that the pleasures are equal in the relevant

¹⁰ See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), p. 28.

¹¹ My discussion of the utilitarian argument owes a good deal to Mark Sagoff's important essay, "On Preserving the Natural Environment," *Yale Law Journal* 84 (197): 205-67. I discuss Sagoff's own views below.

¹² Martin Krieger, "What's Wrong with Plastic Trees?" *Science*, 179 (1973): 446-55, quotations on pp. 451 and 453; quoted by Sagoff, p. 206.

¹³ Sagoff, p. 206-7.

¹⁴ Krieger, p. 451; quoted by Sagoff, p. 207.

respects (e.g., of equal duration and intensity), both are of equal value. To the suggestion that pleasures rooted in real redwoods are "higher" or "nobler" than those rooted in plastic ones, the reply must be that there is a long, untold story surrounding the idea of "higher" and "lower" pleasures, that no hedonistic utilitarian has yet succeeded in telling this story, and, indeed, that it may be inconsistent for a hedonistic utilitarian to believe this. Other things being equal, if a plastic environment can give rise to pleasures equal in value to those arising out of a natural environment, we will have just as much or as little reason to preserve the latter as to manufacture the former. Moreover, if the pleasures flowing from the manufactured environment should happen to outweigh those accompanying the natural environment, we would then have greater reason to enlarge the world of plastic trees and reduce that of living ones.

It is open to utilitarians to argue in response that theirs is a theory designed for living in the world as it is, not in the world as it might be, a theory to be used in actual, not wildly hypothetical situations. While it might conceivably be the case that more pleasure would result from plastic than from real environments, this simply is not the way things are.¹⁵ Unfortunately for this type of reply, things seem to be otherwise. As Krieger notes, "Federal environmental policy is such that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."¹⁶ Commenting on this, Sagoff writes that

rich people, for example, have the background and leisure to cultivate a taste in beautiful environments and only they have the money to live in or near them. Rising property values in protected areas drive the poor out. If the pleasures of the poor were measured equally with those of the rich, then quicker than you can say "cost-benefit analysis," there would be parking lots, condominiums and plastic trees.¹⁷

The empirical point is that, in the world as it actually is, there are grounds for thinking that environmental protection efforts favor the interests of a powerful elite rather than maximizing the pleasures of all, as hedonistic utilitarianism requires. Thus, if protectionist policies do not serve the cause of utility as much as would a plastic takeover, then hedonistic utilitarianism obliges us to move in the direction of a world of plastic trees, even in the world as it actually is. If a *reductio* is possible in assessing theories relating to our duties regarding the environment, hedonistic utilitarianism falls victim to this form of refutation.

¹⁵ R. M. Hare, for example, defends utilitarianism in this manner. See his "Ethical Theory and Utilitarianism" in *Contemporary British Philosophy* 4, ed. H. D. Lewis (London, 1976).

¹⁶ Martin Krieger, "Six Propositions on the Poor and Pollution" *Policy Sciences* 1 (1970): 311-24; quotation on p. 318; quoted by Sagoff, p. 210.

¹⁷ Sagoff, p. 210.

THE EMBODIMENT OF CULTURAL VALUES ARGUMENT

According to this argument, the natural environment, or certain parts of it, symbolize or express certain of our culture's values. In Sagoff's words, "Our rivers, forests, and wildlife . . . serve our society as paradigms of concepts we cherish," for example, freedom, integrity, power.¹⁸ "A wild area may be powerful, majestic, free; an animal may express courage, innocence, purpose, and strength. As a nation we value these qualities: the obligation toward nature is an obligation toward them."¹⁹ Thus, we are to preserve the environment because in doing so we preserve these natural expressions of the values of our culture.

This argument is not intended to be utilitarian. The claim is not made that the consequences of natural preservation will be better, all considered, if we preserve wilderness areas, for example, than if we allow their development for commercial purposes. Whether we ought to preserve wilderness is not to be settled by cost-benefit analysis. Rather, since our obligation is to the cultural values themselves embodied in nature, our obligation to preserve the natural environment cannot be overridden by or, for that matter, based upon calculations about the comparative value of the consequences of respecting them. The propriety of respect for cultural values is not a consequence of its being useful to respect them.

Because this argument is avowedly nonconsequentialist and not just nonutilitarian, it is reasonably clear that it must stand independently of the corruption of character argument. Moreover, though in some ways similar to the offense against an ideal argument, the two are distinct, for the offense argument involves the principle that certain ways of acting run counter to an ideal of human nature, whereas the embodiment of cultural values argument involves the principle that certain ways of acting violate an ideal of how a member of a particular culture ought to behave. Since it is conceivable that persons might act in accordance with their culture's ideals and yet violate a proposed ideal of human nature (e.g., if one's culture values militancy, while pacifism is an ideal of human nature), and vice versa, there is reason not to conflate the embodiment and the offense arguments.

What the embodiment argument has in common with the other arguments considered here is the view that environmental objects have no value in their own right. This is perhaps not so clear in the present case because the embodiment argument carries with it "objectivist" presuppositions. Advocates of this argument do hold that the environment itself has certain objective qualities—e.g., majesty, power, freedom. These *qualities* are *in* nature no less than are, say, chromosomes. But the *value* these qualities have is not something else that

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 245.

is *in them* independently of the dominant interest of a given culture ("our cultural heritage"). On the contrary, what qualities in nature are valuable is a consequence of what qualities are essential in one's cultural heritage. For example, if freedom is a dominant cultural value, then, since animals or rivers in the wild embody this quality, they have value and ought to be preserved. What *qualities* a natural object expresses is an objective question, but the *value* a natural object has is not something it has objectively in its own right, but only as it happens to embody those qualities valued by one's culture.

The embodiment argument provides an enormously important and potentially powerful basis for a political-legal argument on behalf of the preservation of American wilderness. It is easy to see how one may use it to argue for "what is best" in American society: freedom, integrity, independence, loyalty, etc. It is the speculative developer rather than the conservationist who seems to be running roughshod over our nation's values. On this view, Disneyland, not Yosemite seems un-American. Moreover, by insisting that such values as freedom and integrity cannot be trumped even if the consequences of doing so are utilitarian, advocates of the embodiment argument strike a blow which helps to counter the developer's argument that the commercial development of the wilderness will bring about better consequences, more pleasure to more people, than leaving it undeveloped. The embodiment argument replies that, though this may be true, it just so happens to be irrelevant. Given the nature of values such as freedom, integrity, etc., it is inappropriate to destroy their expression in nature in the name of utilitarian consequences. The rhetorical force of such arguments can be great, and can be a powerful practical weapon in the war for the preservation of nature.

But the embodiment argument does not have comparable philosophical strength. Two problems in particular haunt it. First, how are we to establish what our culture's values are? Sagoff states that we are to do this by consulting our artistic (cultural) history. However, if we do this we do not hear a chorus singing the same tune; on the contrary, there is much dissonance, some of which Sagoff himself mentions (e.g., the view of wilderness as an adversary to be tamed versus the view that it is to be cherished). Moreover, even if we were to arrive at a cultural consensus, the basis which Sagoff recommends is suspiciously elitist, reminding one of Ross' reference to "the judgment of the best people" in the determination of what is valuable.²⁰ Implicit in Sagoff's way of establishing what our cultural values are is an evaluative estimate of whose judgment to trust. The cards are stacked against the developer from the outset, since developers normally do not have the time or inclination to dabble in arts, history, and letters. It is not surprising, therefore, that developers take a back seat to the values of freedom, integrity, etc. The argument is indeed potentially a powerful political weapon, but fundamental questions go begging.

²⁰ W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 41.

A second problem is no less severe. Cultural values can be relative, both between different cultures and within the same culture at different times. Thus, even were we to concede that *our* cultural values up to now call for the preservation of nature, that would entail nothing whatever about what environmental policies ought to be pushed in *other* countries (e.g., in Kenya or India, where many species of wild animals are endangered). Nor would it guarantee even in our own country that future environmental policy should continue to be protectionist. If plastic trees are possible, our culture might evolve to prefer them over real ones, in which case the embodiment of cultural values argument would sanction replacing natural with plastic flora.

Sagoff recognizes the possibility of significant changes in a culture's dominant values. He observes that we might "change the nature of our cultural heritage"²¹ and then goes on to imagine what a changed cultural heritage might be like—e.g., imagining a four-lane highway painted through *Christina's World*. However, I do not believe he realizes the full significance of the issues at hand. If, as he supposes, hedonistic utilitarianism falls victim to a *reductio* by allowing that a plastic environment might be just as good or better than a living one, consistency requires that we reach the same judgment *re* the embodiment of cultural values argument. That argument, too, allows that a plastic environment might be just as good or better than a natural one, *if* the dominant value of our culture were to become plasticized.

I conclude this section, therefore, not by claiming to have shown that nonconscious natural objects do have a good or value of their own, independent of human interests. I only conclude that the principal arguments that might be advanced for thinking that we can reasonably account for our duties regarding the environment short of postulating such value in nature fail to do so. Thus, neither the possibility of, nor the need for, postulating that nonconscious natural objects have a value that is independent of human interests, has been rationally undermined.

V. INHERENT GOODNESS?

In this final section, I offer some tentative remarks about the nature of inherent goodness, emphasizing their tentativeness and incompleteness. I comment first on five different but related ideas.

(1) *The presence of inherent value in a natural object is independent of any awareness, interest, or appreciation of it by any conscious being.* This does not tell us what objects are inherently good or why, only that *if* an object is inherently good its value must *inhere in* (*be in*) the object itself. Inherent value is not conferred upon objects in the manner of an honorary degree. Like other

²¹ Sagoff, p. 259.

properties in nature, it must be discovered. Contrary to the *Tractatus*, there is value *in* the world, if natural objects are inherently valuable.

(2) *The presence of inherent value in a natural object is a consequence of its possessing those other properties which it happens to possess.* This follows from (1), given the further assumption that inherent goodness is a consequential or supervenient property. By insisting that inherent goodness depends on an object's *own* properties, the point made in (1) that inherent goodness is a value possessed by the object independently of any awareness is reemphasized. *Its* goodness depends on *its* properties.

(3) *The inherent value of a natural object is an objective property of that object.* This differs from but is related to Sagoff's objectivity of the freedom and majesty of natural objects. Certain stretches of the Colorado River, for example, are free, not subjectively, but objectively. The freedom expressed by (or in) the river is an objective fact. But this goes beyond Sagoff's position by insisting that *the value of the river's being free* also is an objective property of the river. If the river is inherently good, in the sense explained in (1), then it is *a fact about the river* that it is good inherently.

(4) *The inherent value of a natural object is such that toward it the fitting attitude is one of admiring respect.* This brings out the appropriateness of regarding what is inherently valuable in a certain way and thus provides a way of connecting what is inherently valuable in the environment with an ideal of human nature. In part, the ideal in question bids us be appreciative of the values nature holds, not merely as a resource to be used in the name of human interests, but inherently. The ideal bids us, further, to regard what is inherently valuable with both admiration and respect. Admiration is fitting because not everything in nature is inherently valuable (what is is to be admired both because of its value *and* because of its comparative uniqueness). Respect is appropriate because this is a fitting attitude to have toward that which has value in its own right. One must realize that its being valuable is not contingent on one's happening to value it, so that to treat it *merely* as a means to human ends is to mistreat it. Such treatment shows a lack of respect for its being something which has value independently of these ends. Thus, I fall short of the ideal if I gratuitously destroy what has inherent value, or even if I regard it merely as having value only relative to human desires. But half the story about ideals of human nature remains untold if we leave out the part about the value inherent in those things toward which we can act in the ideal way. So it is vital to insist that our having ideals is neither to deny nor diminish the further point that this ideal requires postulating inherent value in nature, independently of these ideals.

(5) *The admiring respect of what is inherently valuable in nature gives rise to the preservation principle.* By the "preservation principle" I mean a principle of nondestruction, noninterference, and, generally, nonmeddling. By char-

acterizing this in terms of a principle, moreover, I am emphasizing that preservation (letting be) be regarded as a moral imperative. Thus, if I regard wild stretches of the Colorado River as inherently valuable and regard these sections with admiring respect, I also think it wrong to destroy these sections of the river; I think one ought not to meddle in the river's affairs, as it were.

A difficult question to answer is whether the preservation principle gives us a principle of absolute or of *prima facie* duty. It is unclear how it can be absolute, for it appears conceivable that in some cases letting be what is at present inherently good in nature may lead to value diminution or loss in the future. For example, because of various sedimentary changes, a river which is now wild and free might in time be transformed into a small, muddy creek; thus, it might be necessary to override the preservation principle in order to preserve or increase what is inherently valuable in nature. However, even if the preservation principle is regarded as being only *prima facie*, it is still possible to agree on at least one point with those who regard it as absolute, i.e., the common rejection of the "human interests principle," which says:

Whenever human beings can benefit more from overriding the preservation principle than if they observe it, the preservation principle ought to be overridden.

This principle *must* be rejected by anyone who accepts the preservation principle because it distorts the very conception of goodness underlying that principle. If the sort of value natural objects possess is inherent, then one fails to show a proper respect for these objects if one is willing to destroy them merely on the grounds that this would benefit human beings. Since such destruction is precisely what the human interests principle commits one to, one cannot *both* accept the preservation principle, absolute or *prima facie*, *and* also accept the human interests principle. The common enemy of all preservationists are those who accept the human interests principle.

This brief discussion of the preservation principle may also cast some light on the problem of making intelligible cross species value comparisons, e.g., in the case of the survival of caribou versus the economic development of wilderness. The point preservationists must keep in mind is that to ask how many caribou lives equals in value the disvalue of how much economic loss is unanswerable because it is an improper question. It confounds two incommensurable kinds of good, the inherent good of the caribou with the noninherent good of economic benefits. Indeed, because these kinds of good are incommensurable, a utilitarian or consequentialist environmental ethic, which endeavors to accommodate both kinds of goodness, is doomed to fail. The inherent value of the caribou cannot be cashed in in terms of human economic benefit, and such a theory ends up providing us with no clear moral direction. For the preservationist, the proper philosophical response to those who would uproot

the environment in the name of human benefit is to say that they fail to understand the very notion of something being inherently good.

Two questions which I have not endeavored to answer are: (a) what, if anything in general, makes something inherently good, and (b) how can we know, if we can, what things are inherently good? The two questions are not unrelated. If we could establish that there is something (X) such that, whenever any object (Y) has X it is inherently good, we could then go on to try to establish how we can know that any object has X . Unfortunately, I now have very little to say about these questions, and what little I do have to say concerns only how not to answer them.

Two possible answers to question (a) merit mention. The first is that an object (X) is inherently good if it is good of its kind. This is a view I have assumed and argued for elsewhere,²² but it now appears to me to be completely muddled. The concept of inherent goodness cannot be reduced to the notion of something being good of its kind, for though I believe that we can conceive of the goodness any X has, if X is good of its kind, as a value it has in its own right, there is no reason to believe that we ought to have the attitude of admiring respect toward what is (merely) good of its kind. A good murderer is good-of-his-kind, but is not thereby a proper object of admiring respect, and similarly in the case of natural objects. The type of inherent goodness required by an environmental ethic is conceptually distinct from being good of its kind.²³

The second possible answer to (a) is that life makes something inherently good. To what extent this view is connected with Schweitzer's famous ethic of reverence for life, or with Kenneth Goodpaster's recent argument²⁴ for considering life as a necessary and sufficient condition of something being "morally considerable," I do not know, and I cannot here explore these matters in detail. But limiting the class of beings which have inherent value to the class of living beings seems to be an arbitrary decision and one that does not serve well as a basis for an environmental ethic. That it appears arbitrary is perhaps best seen by considering the case of beauty, since in nature, as in art, it is not essential to the beauty of an object to insist that something living be involved.

As for question (b), I have even less to say and that is negative also. My one point is that we cannot find out what is inherently good merely by finding out what those things are toward which we have admiring respect. All that this tells us is facts about the people who have this attitude. It does not tell us

²² See my essay on Feinberg, footnote 9.

²³ Thus, I do not retract my arguments against Feinberg as they relate to the idea of something's being good of its kind. What I do retract is the misidentification, on my part, of inherent goodness with this type of goodness. Recognizing that something is good of its kind does not call forth my admiring respect; recognizing its being inherently good does.

²⁴ Goodpaster, "Being Morally Considerable."

whether it is the fitting attitude to have. To put the point differently, we can be as mistaken in our judgment that something is inherently good as we can be in our judgment about how old or how heavy it is. Our feeling one way or another does not settle matters one way or the other.

How, then, are we to settle these matters? I wish I knew. I am not even certain that they can be settled in a rationally coherent way, and hence the tentativeness of my closing remarks. But more fundamentally, there is the earlier question about the very possibility of an environmental ethic. If I am right, the development of what can properly be called an environmental ethic requires that we postulate inherent value in nature. I have tried to say something about this variety of goodness as well as something about its role in an ethic of the environment. If my remarks have been intelligible and my arguments persuasive, then, though the project is far from complete, we at least know the direction in which we must move to make headway in environmental ethics, and that is no small advantage.

Biocentric Individualism

Gary Varner

INTRODUCTION

As a boy, I often wandered in the woods near my home in central Ohio. One August day, I dug up a maple seedling from the woods and planted it in one of my mother's flowerbeds beside the house. Within hours, the seedling was terribly wilted. Convinced that I had mortally wounded the plant, I felt a wave of guilt and, wishing to hasten what I believed to be its inevitable and imminent demise, I pulled it up, broke its small stalk repeatedly, and stuffed it in the trash. When my mother later explained that the plant was only in temporary shock from being transplanted

into full sun, I felt an even larger wave of guilt for having dispatched it unnecessarily.

Was I just a soft-headed lad? Even then, I did not think that the plant was conscious, and since childhood, I have not again tried to "euthanize" a doomed plant. I feel no guilt about weeding the garden, mowing the lawn, or driving over the plants which inevitably crowd the four wheel drive paths I gravitate towards while camping. Nevertheless, I now let "weeds" grow indiscriminately in my wooded backyard, I mow around the odd wildflower that pops up amid the Bermuda grass out front, and I sometimes swerve to avoid a plant when tracking solitude in my

truck. I believe that insects are not conscious, that they are in the same category, morally speaking, as plants, yet I often carry cockroaches and wasps outside rather than kill them. I'll even pause while mowing to let a grasshopper jump to safety. My relative diffidence regarding insects could just be erring on the side of caution. I believe that insects *probably* are not conscious, whereas I am *cock-sure* that plants are not; so when I do dispatch an insect, I make a point of crushing it quite thoroughly, including its head. Similarly, my current plant-regarding decisions are doubtless inspired in part by aesthetic judgments rather than concern for their non-conscious well-being. The wildflowers in my front yard are just more interesting to look at than a continuous stretch of Bermuda grass, and my unkempt backyard buffers me from my neighbors. Still, I believe it is better—*morally* better—that plants thrive rather than die, even if they do not benefit humans or other, conscious creatures. So if I was just soft-headed to feel bad about that maple seedling, then my gray matter hasn't quite firmed up yet.

But *am* I just soft-headed, or is there a rational case to be made for plants and other presumably non-conscious organisms? A few philosophers have thought so. The famous doctor and theologian, Albert Schweitzer, wrote:

A man is truly ethical only when he obeys the compulsion to help all life which he is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives. He does not ask how far this or that life deserves one's sympathy as being valuable, nor, beyond that, whether and to what degree it is capable of feeling. Life as such is sacred to him. He tears no leaf from a tree, plucks no flower, and takes care to crush no insect. If in summer he is working by lamplight, he prefers to keep the window shut and breathe a stuffy atmosphere rather than see one insect after another fall with singed wings upon his table.

If he walks on the road after a shower and sees an earthworm which has strayed on it, . . . he lifts it from the deadly stone surface, and puts it on the grass. If he comes across an insect which has fallen into a puddle, he stops a moment in order to hold out a leaf or a stalk on which it can save itself. (Schweitzer 1955, p. 310)

And in the contemporary literature of environmental ethics, Paul Taylor's 1986 book, *Respect For Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, is a must-read for any serious student of the field. In it (and in a 1981 essay which is reproduced in this volume) Taylor argues that extending a Kantian ethic of respect to non-conscious individuals is plausible once one understands that organisms, "conscious or not, all are equally teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unified system of goal-oriented activities directed toward their preservation and well-being," that each has a good of its own which is "prima facie worthy of being preserved or promoted as an end in itself and for the sake of the entity whose good it is" (Taylor 1981, pp. 210, 201 in original edition).

I call views like Schweitzer's and Taylor's *biocentric individualism*, because they attribute moral standing to all living things while denying that holistic entities like species or ecosystems have moral standing. Hence they are *biocentric*—rather than, say anthropocentric or sentientist—but they are still *individualist* views—rather than versions of holism.

Schweitzer's and Taylor's views differ in important ways. Perhaps most significantly, Schweitzer talks as if we incur guilt every time we harm a living thing, even when we do so to preserve human life. He writes:

Whenever I in any way sacrifice or injure life, I am not within the sphere of the ethical, but I become guilty, whether it be egoistically guilty for the sake of maintaining my own existence or welfare, or unegoistically guilty for the sake of maintaining a greater number of other existences or their welfare. (Schweitzer 1955, p. 325).

In the '40s and '50s, Schweitzer was celebrated in the popular media for bringing modern hospital services to the heart of Africa. Yet he appears to have thought that he incurred guilt when he saved human lives by killing disease microbes, not to mention when he killed things to eat. By contrast, in his book, Taylor makes it clear that he believes we are justified in violating plants' (and some animals') most basic interests in a range of cases: certainly for the sake of surviving, but also for the sake of furthering

110 ENVIRONMENTAL HOLISM

non-basic, but culturally important, interests of humans. He does impose on this a requirement of "minimum wrong," that is, harming as few living things as possible in the process (Taylor 1986, p. 289), but Taylor, unlike Schweitzer, believes that we can prioritize interests in a way that justifies us in preserving our own lives and pursuing certain non-basic interests at the expense of plants' (and some animals') most basic interests.

I will return to this question of which interests take precedence in various cases of conflict later. That is certainly an important question for any biocentric individualist. After all, if you think that even disease microbes and radishes have moral standing, then you need an explanation of how your interests can override those of millions of plants and microbes which must be doomed in the course of living a full human life. Otherwise, you are left with Schweitzer's perpetual guilt. But if I wasn't just being a soft-headed lad when I regretted killing that maple seedling—if there is a rational case to be made for plants (and other non-conscious organisms) having moral standing—then the first question is: Why think this?

WHY THINK THAT PLANTS HAVE MORAL STANDING?

I have two basic arguments for the conclusion that they do. Before discussing these arguments, however, it is important to be more clear about what, specifically, is being asked.

As I use the terms, to say that an entity has moral standing is to say that it has interests, and to say that it has interests is to say that it has needs and/or desires, and that the satisfaction of those needs and/or desires creates intrinsic value. When I say that their satisfaction creates intrinsic value, I mean that it makes the world a better place, independent of the entity's relations to other things. As the introduction to this volume emphasizes, the term "intrinsic value" is a key one in environmental ethics, but it is also a very nuanced one. There certainly is a distinction to be drawn between valuing something because it is useful, and valuing it apart from its usefulness. One

way of expressing the biocentric individualist stance, then, would be to describe it as the view that moral agents ought to value plants' lives intrinsically rather than merely instrumentally. However, putting it this way suggests that plants' flourishing might not be a good thing if there were no conscious valuers around to consider it, and one of my arguments for biocentric individualism purports to show that plants' flourishing is a good thing independent of there being any conscious valuers around at all. So I define biocentric individualism in terms of plants having interests, the satisfaction of which creates intrinsic value as defined above, whether or not there are any conscious valuers around.

A second thing to be clear about is what I mean by "plants." For simplicity's sake, I will speak simply of "plants," but unless stated otherwise, what I mean by this is *all non-conscious organisms*. Later I will take up the question of which non-human animals lack consciousness. For now, suffice it to say that even after the taxonomic revisions of the 1970s, the animal kingdom includes a number of organisms that are poor candidates for consciousness, e.g. barnacles and sponges. Besides plants, the new taxonomy includes three whole kingdoms, the members of which are equally poor candidates. The fungi are just heterotrophic plants. Organisms in the new kingdoms monera and protista—single celled organisms like bacteria and amoebas (respectively)—were previously classified as animals. But in this essay, "plants" is a shorthand for all of these non-conscious organisms.

In summary, I assume the following definitions of these key terms:

Moral standing: An entity has moral standing if and only if it has interests.

Interests: An entity has interests if and only if the fulfillment of its needs and/or desires creates intrinsic value.

Intrinsic value: Intrinsic value is the value something has independently of its relationships to other things. If a thing has intrinsic value, then its

existence (flourishing, etc.) makes the world a better place, independently of its value to anything else or any other entity's awareness of it.

Plants: Unless stated otherwise, "plants" refers to all non-conscious organisms, including (presumably) all members of the plant kingdom, but also all members of the kingdoms fungi, monera, and protista, as well as some members of the animal kingdom (to be specified later).

So the question is: Why think that all those "plants" have interests, the satisfaction of which creates intrinsic value, independently of any conscious organism's interest in them?

My first argument for this conclusion is developed in detail in my book, *In Nature's Interests?* (Varner 1998, chapter three). There I argue against the dominant, mental state theory of individual welfare (for short, the mental state theory). The dominant account of individual welfare in recent Western moral philosophy has identified what is in an individual's interests with what the individual actually desires, plus what the individual would desire if he or she were both adequately informed and impartial across phases of his or her life. This dominant account then identifies what is in an individual's *best* interests with the latter, with what he or she would desire under those idealized conditions. Formally:

The mental state theory of individual welfare: X is in an individual A's interests just in case:

1. A actually desires X, or
2. A would desire X if A were sufficiently informed and impartial across phases of his or her life; and
3. What is in A's *best* interests is defined in terms of clause (2).

Something like this theory is accepted by most contemporary moral and political philosophers.

My first argument for the moral standing of plants begins by pointing to an inadequacy of the mental state theory.

Argument 1: The mental state theory seems to provide an inadequate account of the interests of conscious individuals. If that is so, and if the way to fix it involves acknowledging that intrinsic value is created by the satisfaction of non-conscious, biologically based needs of such individuals, then it makes sense to attribute interests to plants. For although plants are incapable of having desires, they have biologically based needs just as do conscious individuals.

Here is an example that brings out the problem I see in the mental state theory:

Example 1: By the nineteenth century, British mariners were carrying citrus fruit on long sea voyages to prevent the debilitating disease of scurvy. It was not until this century that scientists discovered that we need about 10 milligrams of ascorbic acid a day, and that citrus fruits prevent scurvy because they contain large amounts of ascorbic acid.

To see how this raises a problem, consider what is meant by being "adequately informed" in the second clause of the mental state theory. Some authors limit "adequate information" to the best scientific knowledge of the day. But then it would be false that those mariners had any interest in getting 10 milligrams of ascorbic acid a day. This is because they did not in fact desire it (they did not even know it exists), and even having the best scientific knowledge of the day would not have led them to desire it because no one then knew about it. The problem is that it certainly seems wrong to say that getting 10 milligrams of ascorbic acid a day was not in their interests.

This problem is easily avoided by adding a clause about biologically based needs to our theory of individual welfare. Renamed appropriately, the theory would now be something like this:

The psycho-biological theory of individual welfare: X is in an individual A's interests just in case:

112 ENVIRONMENTAL HOLISM

1. A actually desires X,
2. A would desire X if A were sufficiently informed and impartial across phases of his or her life; or
3. X serves some biologically based need of A.

In my book (Varner 1998, pp. 64–71), I give a detailed analysis of the complex notion of a biologically based need, arguing that these can be determined by examining the evolutionary history of an organism. Here, I think it unnecessary to revisit that analysis. Ascorbic acid clearly served a biologically based need of sailors before modern scientists discovered it. So, on this psycho-biological theory, it was in those sailors' interest to get enough of it, even though no one knew anything about ascorbic acid at the time.

Note that this new theory says nothing about what is in one's *best* interests. I replaced clause (3) in the mental state theory rather than adding another clause because identifying what is in one's best interests with what one would desire under ideal motivational and informational conditions—clause (2)—faces similar problems. Other things being equal, it seems that getting enough ascorbic acid was in those mariners' best interests, even though they would still not have desired it even under the best motivational and informational conditions. So even after adding a clause about biologically based needs, it would still be a mistake to identify what is in one's best interests with clause (2).

One limitation of the nineteenth-century mariners example is that being "sufficiently informed" can be analyzed other than in terms of having "the best scientific knowledge of the day." We could, for instance, analyze it in terms of having all the scientific knowledge that humans will ever or could ever accumulate. I believe there are other problems with this analysis (see Varner 1998, pp. 58–60), but it would solve the problem raised by the above example. However, here is another example that brings out the same kind of problem with the mental state theory, and where the alternative analysis of "sufficiently informed" doesn't help:

Example 2: Like many cat owners, I grapple with the question of whether and when to allow my cat, Nanci, to go outside. Cats find the outdoors endlessly fascinating, but they also encounter health risks outside, including exposure to feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and fleas (which Nanci happens to be allergic to).

I frankly do not know whether or not keeping Nanci indoors is in her best interests, all things considered. Nonetheless, it does seem clear that keeping her inside would serve some interests of hers, in at least some ways. For instance, it would prevent exposure to FeLV and fleas. Yet the mental state theory does not support this intuition because it is not clear that it even makes sense to talk about what an animal like Nanci would desire if she were "sufficiently informed and impartial across phases of her life." I assume that Nanci is congenitally incapable of understanding the relevant information about FeLV and fleas. So on the mental state theory, what are we to say about her going outside? It looks like we have to conclude that, whenever she in fact wants to go out, she has no interest whatsoever in staying inside, because clause (2) is irrelevant in her case. It just doesn't make sense, in the case of animals like Nanci, to talk about what they would desire were they "sufficiently informed" (let alone "impartial across phases of their lives"). What is in their interests is whatever they happen to desire at any moment in time. This is another counter-intuitive implication of the mental state theory, and one which the psycho-biological theory avoids. Although the psycho-biological theory as formulated above is silent on the issue of what is in an individual's best interests, it at least supports the intuition that Nanci has some interest in staying inside (because doing so would serve her biologically based needs by preventing exposure to FeLV and fleas), even if she now desires to go outside and no sense can be made of what an animal like her would desire under ideal epistemological and motivational conditions.

The examples of Nanci and the nineteenth-century mariners together illustrate a general problem for the mental state theory. The theory ties all

of our interests to what we desire, either actually or under ideal epistemological and motivational conditions, but not all of our interests are tied in this way to our conscious desires and beliefs. Most (maybe even all) of our desires are tied to our beliefs about the world, because as our beliefs change, our desires change. For instance, suppose that I desire to marry Melody, primarily because I believe that she is a fine fiddler. When I find out that my belief about her is false, my desire to marry her will presumably be extinguished. Similarly, if I do not desire to marry Melinda only because I believe that she is a lousy fiddler, when I find out that she is actually a virtuoso, I will presumably form a desire to marry her. My interest in marrying each woman comes and goes with my beliefs about her. However, nothing I could possibly believe about the world, whether true or false, could change the fact that I need about 10 milligrams a day of ascorbic acid to stay healthy, and no matter how strongly I might desire it, I will never be able to make it true that going without ascorbic acid is in my interest. My interest in ascorbic acid is determined by a biological need that exists wholly independent of my beliefs and desires. This is a central advantage of the psycho-biological theory over the mental state theory. Some things are only in our interests if we happen to desire them or have certain beliefs about the world, but other things are in our interests no matter what we desire or believe, or what we would desire and believe under ideal conditions. We can refer to the former as preference interests and to the latter as biological interests. The mental state theory errs by identifying all of our interests with our preference interests. The psycho-biological theory acknowledges these, but also accounts for biological interests that are wholly independent of our preference interests.

That being said, my first argument for the moral standing of plants is now complete. The above examples are intended to illustrate how the dominant, mental state theory of individual welfare is flawed, because it ties all of individuals' interests to their actual or hypothetical desires. An obvious way to fix this problem is to hold that individuals also have biological interests in the fulfillment of their various

biologically based needs, whether they (like the nineteenth-century mariners) could only become aware of these needs under special circumstances, or they (like Nanci the cat) are congenitally incapable of desiring that those needs be fulfilled. But then, since plants too have biologically based needs, they too have interests, even though they are congenitally incapable of desiring anything at all.

I did not include my second argument for the view that plants have moral standing in my 1998 book because, frankly, I doubted that it would be persuasive to anyone not already essentially convinced. Nevertheless, I think that this second argument expresses very clearly the most basic value assumption of the biocentric individualist. It also ties in to famous thought experiments in ethical theory and environmental ethics, and so I include it here.

The argument is driven by a variant of a famous thought experiment that British philosopher G. E. Moore used to cast doubt on sentientism (the view that only sentient—that is conscious—organisms have moral standing). Moore discussed the classical utilitarians (Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Sidgwick, who were all sentientists) at length and in particular responded to Sidgwick's claim that "No one would consider it rational to aim at the production of beauty in external nature, apart from any possible contemplation of it by human beings." Moore responded:

Well, I may say at once, that I, for one, do consider this rational; and let us see if I cannot get any one to agree with me. Consider what this admission really means. It entitles us to put the following case. Let us imagine one world exceedingly beautiful. Imagine it as beautiful as you can; put into it whatever on this earth you most admire—mountains, rivers, the sea; trees, and sunsets, stars and moon. Imagine these all combined in the most exquisite proportions, so that no one thing jars against another, but each contributes to increase the beauty of the whole. And then imagine the ugliest world you can possibly conceive. Imagine it simply one heap of filth, containing everything that is most disgusting to us, for whatever reason, and the whole, as far as may be, without one redeeming feature. Such a

114 ENVIRONMENTAL HOLISM

pair of worlds we are entitled to compare: they fall within Prof. Sidgwick's meaning, and the comparison is highly relevant to it. The only thing we are not entitled to imagine is that any human being ever has or ever, by any possibility, *can*, live in either, can ever see and enjoy the beauty of the one or hate the foulness of the other. Well, even so, supposing them quite apart from any possible contemplation by human beings; still, is it irrational to hold that it is better that the beautiful world should exist, than the one which is ugly? Would it not be well, in any case, to do what we could to produce it rather than the other? (Moore 1903, p. 83)

Moore thought we would agree with him in answering yes. But then, he continued:

If it be once admitted that the beautiful world *in itself* is better than the ugly, then it follows, that however many beings may enjoy it, and however much better their enjoyment may be than it is itself, yet its mere existence adds *something* to the goodness of the whole . . . (Moore 1903, pp. 83–85; emphases in original)

That is, Moore concluded, the mere existence of beauty adds intrinsic value to the world.

I have always been unsure what to think about Moore's thought experiment, so apparently I am of two minds when it comes to saying that the mere existence of beauty adds intrinsic value to the world. However, I have always felt certain about my answer to an analogous question. Suppose that instead of choosing between creating a beautiful world and an ugly world, the choice were between creating a world devoid of life and a world brimming with living things, neither of which would ever evolve conscious life or even be visited or known about by any conscious organisms. If, like me, you believe that it matters which world is produced and that it would be better to produce the world chock-full of non-conscious life, then you seem to be committed to biocentric individualism. For you appear to believe that life—even non-conscious life—has intrinsic value. To paraphrase Moore:

Argument 2: If we admit that a world of non-conscious living things is *in itself* better than a world devoid of all life, then it follows that however much better it is to be both conscious and alive, the mere existence of non-conscious life adds *something* to the goodness of the world.

Note that this contrasts with the “last man” thought experiment, as characterized in the introduction to this volume (where the last person on earth destroys a tree “just for fun”), in two important ways. First, in my variant of Moore's thought experiment, it is stipulated that there is no person on the scene at all. This is important because an anthropocentrist might try to explain the problem with the last man in terms of his action's effects on his own character. Second, and more importantly, in the “last man” case, the tree is said to be “the last remaining Redwood,” but in my variant of Moore's thought experiment, nothing is said about the plants in question being rare. If we agree that it matters which of my worlds is produced, and that it would be better to produce the plant-filled world, then we seem to agree that the lives of even the most mundane plants add intrinsic value to the world.

JUST WHAT ARE PLANTS' INTERESTS WORTH?

The next question has to be: Just *how valuable* are the interests of plants, in relation to those of humans and other animals? Moral hierarchies are unpopular in many quarters. In particular, feminist philosophers often condemn hierarchical views of beings' relative moral significance for being instruments of patriarchal oppression (see, for instance, Karen Warren's contribution to this volume). But as a biocentric individualist, I feel forced to endorse one. Otherwise, how could I live with myself? I gleefully tear radishes from the garden for a snack, swatting mosquitoes all the while. I take antibiotics for a persistent sinus infection, and (at least when I'm not on antibiotics) I send countless intestinal bacteria on a deadly joyride into the city sewer system every

morning. Unless I can give good reasons for thinking that my interests somehow trump those of microbes and plants (if not also animals), I am left with Albert Schweitzer's view, quoted above, that we "become guilty" whenever we "in any way sacrifice or injure life," even when fighting off disease organisms, eating, and defecating. In my book (Varner 1998, chapter four), I argue that a plausible assumption about what I call "hierarchically structured interests" does the trick, when coupled with empirical observations about certain broad categories of interests.

Here is what I mean by hierarchically structured interests:

Hierarchically structured interests: Two interests are hierarchically structured when the satisfaction of one requires the satisfaction of the other, but not vice-versa.

Certain types of interests clearly stand in this relationship to other types of interests. For example, satisfying my desire to succeed professionally requires the satisfaction of innumerable more particular desires across decades, but not vice-versa. It takes years to succeed professionally, and therefore I have to satisfy innumerable day-to-day desires to eat this or that in the course of completing that long-term project. But each particular desire to eat can be satisfied without satisfying my long-term desire to succeed professionally. So my desires to eat and to succeed professionally are hierarchically structured in the above sense.

Generally, what the contemporary American philosopher Bernard Williams calls "ground projects" and "categorical desires" stand in this relationship to day-to-day desires for particular things. Here is how Williams defines these terms:

Ground projects and categorical desires: A ground project is "a nexus of projects . . . which are closely related to [one's] existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to [one's] life," and a categorical desire is one that answers

the question "Why is life worth living?" (Williams 1981, pp. 13, 12; 1973, pp. 85–86)

A person's ground project normally is a nexus of categorical desires, and generally, a ground project requires decades to complete. There are, of course, exceptions. It is conceivable that a person might have literally only one categorical desire, a desire which he or she could satisfy in one fell swoop. Perhaps a young gymnast aiming at a gold medal in the Olympics is a realistic approximation of this, but notice that even in the case of the gymnast: (1) satisfying the desire for a gold medal requires years of training, and (2) we would probably think it unhealthy and abnormal if the gymnast had no other ground project, if there were no other, longer-term desires that made her life worth living beyond the Olympics. So a ground project normally involves a host of very long-term desires, which bear the above kind of hierarchical relationship with the individual's day-to-day desires for this or that specific thing.

Here is a plausible assumption about interests that are clearly hierarchically structured:

Assumption: Generally speaking, ensuring the satisfaction of interests from similar levels in similar hierarchies of different individuals creates similar amounts of value, and the dooming of interests from similar levels in similar hierarchies of different individuals creates similar levels of disvalue.

In stating the assumption in this way, I do not mean to imply that we can make very fine-tuned judgements about which interests are more valuable than others.¹ All I claim is that interests from certain very broad categories *generally* bear this relationship to interests from other very broad categories. In particular, I argue that the following two principles are reasonable in light of the assumption:

Principle P1 (the priority of desires principle):

Generally speaking, the death of an entity that has desires is a worse thing than the death of an entity that does not.

116 ENVIRONMENTAL HOLISM

Principle P2' (the priority of ground projects principle): Generally speaking, the satisfaction of ground projects is more important than the satisfaction of non-categorical desires.

Since I introduced the above assumption by discussing human ground projects, let me begin with principle P2'.

I call it P2', rather than just P2, because in my book I first introduce, and dismiss, this principle:

Principle P2 (the priority of human desires principle): The satisfaction of the desires of humans is more important than the satisfaction of the desires of animals.

Principle P2 would solve the problem under discussion in this section, but it is transparently speciesist. It says that humans' desires are more important than any other organisms' simply because they are desires of *humans*. Principle P2' compares ground projects to non-categorical desires without asserting that humans' desires are more important than any other organisms'. If it turns out that some non-human animals have ground projects, then Principle P2' applies equally to theirs. Which animals, if any, have ground projects is an empirical question, as is the question of whether all human beings do. Surely some human beings do not. For instance, anencephalic babies and the permanently comatose clearly do not, and perhaps others, like the most profoundly retarded, or those who have lost the will to live, do not. Regarding animals, my hunch is that very few if any non-human animals have ground projects, but maybe some do (perhaps some great apes or cetaceans). The crucial thing to note is that principle P2' is not speciesist. It does not say that humans' interests are more important *because they are humans' interests*. Principle P2' only says that ground projects, wherever they occur, generally have more value than non-categorical desires. P2' leaves the question of which beings have ground projects open for empirical investigation; it does not stipulate that only humans have this especially valuable kind of interest.

So why think that ground projects are more valuable than non-categorical desires? The reason is that, as we saw above, ground projects normally stand in a hierarchical relationship to day-to-day desires for particular things; satisfying a ground project requires the satisfaction of innumerable day-to-day desires for particular things, but not vice-versa. So under the above assumption (that various interests within each type generally have similar amounts of value), satisfying a ground project generally creates more value than satisfying any such day-to-day desire.

I will discuss the implications of P2' in the next section, along with those of P1. First, however, let me discuss the justification of P1. Notice that P1 does not assert that just any desire trumps any biological need or set thereof. Some day-to-day desires for particular things are incredibly trivial and it would be implausible to say that these trivial desires trump seemingly important biological interests like one's biological interest in good cardiovascular health. But all that principle P1 states is that "Generally speaking, the death of an entity that has desires is a worse thing than the death of an entity that does not." This is plausible under the assumption stated above, given the following general fact: maintenance of the capacity to form and satisfy desires requires the on-going satisfaction of the lion's share of one's biological needs. Certainly not every biological need of a conscious organism must be fulfilled for it to go on forming desires. In particular, the account I give in my book implies that the continued functioning of my vasa deferentia is in my biological interest (Varner 1998, p. 97), but obviously I would go on desiring sex (among other things) after a vasectomy. One of the deep challenges to my position (as Vermont philosopher Bill Throop has driven home to me in conversation) is deciding how to individuate interests. Do I have just one biological interest in the continued functioning of my whole cardiovascular system? One interest in the functioning of my heart and another in the functioning of my vascular system? Or do I have myriad interests, in the functioning of my various ventricles, veins, arteries, and so on? This is a difficult issue, but however it gets sorted out, it seems plausible to say that just as sat-

isfying a ground project requires the satisfaction of innumerable day-to-day desires for particular things, maintaining the general capacity to form and satisfy desires requires the on-going satisfaction of the lion's share of one's biological needs. As a conscious process, maintenance of the capacity to form and satisfy desires presumably requires maintenance of myriad biological organs and subsystems, including, at the very least, the respiratory and cardiovascular systems, and most of the central nervous system. The argument for principle P1, then, is this: The only interests plants have in common with conscious organisms are biological interests. The ability to form and satisfy desires stands in a hierarchical relationship to such biological interests. But if interests of these two types generally have similar value, then conscious animals' lives have more value than plants' lives, because animals satisfy both types of interests in the course of their lives, whereas plants satisfy only one type.

The question posed in this section has not been answered precisely. My argument has not shown precisely how much the interests of plants are worth, relative to the interests of humans or other animals. For reasons given in my book (Varner 1998, pp. 80–88), I think it is impossible to give such a precise answer to this question. However, if principle P1 is indeed justified by the principle of inclusiveness (coupled with the assumption articulated above), then it is plausible to conclude that the *lives* of plants are, generally, less valuable than the *lives* of desiring creatures, including yours and mine. And that goes a long way towards showing that biocentric individualism is a practicable view, although most environmental philosophers have doubted that it is.

IS BIOCENTRIC INDIVIDUALISM PRACTICABLE?

One reason for doubt would be that before Paul Taylor, the only well-known biocentric individualist was Albert Schweitzer, and as we have seen, he said flatly that we are guilty for merely keeping ourselves alive

by eating and fighting disease. However, as the foregoing section shows, a biocentric individualist can reasonably endorse a hierarchy of interests and related principles showing why it is better that we do this than let ourselves perish. We can at least say that my view implies this rough hierarchy of value:

ground projects

non-categorical desires

biological interests

Principle P2' states that the satisfaction of a ground project is better than (creates more value than) the satisfaction of any interest of the other two kinds. Thus killing an individual with a ground project robs the world of a special kind of value. According to principle P1, the lives of many non-human animals have more value than the lives of plants, because these conscious organisms have both biological interests and non-categorical desires, whereas plants have only biological interests. Thus killing an animal robs the world of more value than does killing a plant.

The second part of this value hierarchy focuses attention on questions about consciousness that were alluded to earlier: which animals are conscious, which ones have desires? These questions are related, but not equivalent. I assume that all "genuine" desires are conscious, or at least potentially conscious, just as pain is. However, the evidence for desires in non-human animals may not overlap the evidence for pain, because I also assume that desires require relatively sophisticated cognitive capacities, whereas the bare consciousness of pain may not. A detailed treatment of this issue is beyond the scope of this essay, but here is a summary of the conclusions I reach from the more detailed treatment in my book (Varner 1998, pp. 26–30). All normal, mature mammals and birds very probably *do* have desires, and there is a somewhat weaker case for saying that "herps" (reptiles and amphibians) do too. The case for saying that fish have desires is decisively weaker. However, the available evidence makes it very likely

118 ENVIRONMENTAL HOLISM

that all vertebrates, including fish, can feel pain. This is a curious result—it sounds odd to say that fish could feel pain without desiring an end to it—and so I suspect that as more kinds of scientific studies are available than I considered in my book, the evidence for pain and for desire in the animal kingdom will converge. However, for the sake of discussion here, I assume that although mammals and birds have desires, fish and invertebrates do not.²

We can now spell out more specifically the implications of the principles defended in the preceding section. Principle P1 tells us that it is better to kill desireless organisms than desiring ones. This addresses Schweitzer's hyperbolic guilt, because it shows that it would be worse for a human being to kill herself than it would be for her to kill any plant or microbe for the sake of good nutrition or fighting off disease. However, in light of the above discussion of consciousness, this does not imply that vegetarian diets are better, since most invertebrates apparently lack consciousness, and even fish may lack desires. Also, since it is possible to obtain animal byproducts like eggs and dairy foods from animals without killing them, a lacto-ovo diet might be perfectly respectful of animals' intrinsic value. (There are other ethical considerations, of course, as well as complicated issues in human nutrition. For an overview, see the essays in Comstock 1994.)

I also suspect that Principle P2' can be used to make a case for the humane killing of animals who clearly have (non-categorical) desires. My reasoning is as follows. To the extent that hunting and slaughter-based animal agriculture play an important role in sustainable human communities, the value of protecting the background conditions for satisfying humans' ground projects would seem to support the necessary killing, at least if the animals live good lives and are killed humanely. Obviously, various animals, including mammals and birds, played a very large role in both paleolithic hunting-gathering societies and in the emergence of agriculture. Domesticated mammals continue to have a crucial role in sustainable agricultural systems in so-called "developing" nations, where they provide not only food but draft power and fertilizer. But at present it is still un-

clear to me just how much killing of animals might be necessary in utopian sustainable communities of the future.

In light of these implications of Principles P1 and P2', the biocentric individualist stance hardly looks unlivable in the way Schweitzer's talk of perpetual guilt would suggest. There is a deeper reason that many environmental philosophers dismiss the biocentric individualist stance, however. They fear that it somehow devalues nature and thus, even if it is not literally an unlivable ethic, it is "inadequate" as an *environmental* ethic. This charge of "inadequacy" takes at least two distinct forms, and the biocentric individualist response to each must be different.

First, it is often claimed that individualist theories in general (that is, anthropocentrism and sentimentalism in addition to biocentric individualism) have implications that do not comport with the environmentalist agenda, which includes things like endangered species programs, the elimination of exotic species from natural areas, and the whole emphasis on preserving remaining natural areas. The heart of this claim is that because they focus on individuals, such theories get the wrong answers in a range of cases. For instance, environmentalists are keenly interested in preserving remaining natural areas, but, so this objection goes, biocentric individualism cannot justify this emphasis. For if we compare a woods and a cultivated field, or an old growth forest and a managed timber lot, they may look equally valuable from a biocentric individualist stance. Simply put, if only biological interests are at stake, then a cultivated area supporting thousands of thriving plants creates just as much value as a wild area that supports the same number of plants. Similarly, the biological interests of common plants seem no more valuable than the biological interests of rare plants.

This first version of the "inadequacy" charge misfires precisely because there *is* more at stake than the biological interests of the plants involved. Environmentalists commonly claim that in order to preserve the ecological context in which humans can live healthy, productive, and innovative lives into the indefinite future, we must stop the current trend of species extinctions and preserve most remaining wild

areas. Characterizing the environmentalists' claim as a general need to safeguard background biological diversity in our environment, my response to the first version of the inadequacy charge is this. Principle P2' attaches preeminent importance to safeguarding humans' ability to satisfy their ground projects. But if safeguarding this ability requires safeguarding background biological diversity in our environment, then doing so is of preeminent importance, at least instrumentally, in my view. That is, to the extent that environmentalists are correct that their practical agenda safeguards long-term human interests, any version of biocentric individualism which, like mine, attributes preeminent importance to certain interests of humans can probably endorse their agenda.

At this point it is important to note that two senses of the term "anthropocentric" are sometimes conflated in discussions of environmental ethics. In one sense of the term, a view is anthropocentric just in case it denies that non-human nature has any intrinsic value whatsoever. Obviously, biocentric individualism is not anthropocentric in this sense. But in another sense, a view is called anthropocentric if it gives pride of place to certain interests which only humans have. Schweitzer's version of biocentric individualism is not anthropocentric in this second sense, but because I doubt that any non-human animals have ground projects, mine is. For clarity's sake, I use the labels "valuational anthropocentrism" and "axiological anthropocentrism" to refer, respectively, to views that deny all intrinsic value to non-humans and to views that acknowledge the intrinsic value of some non-human beings but insist that only humans have certain preeminently important interests (Varner 1998, p. 121).

The other form of the "inadequacy" charge focuses on the fact that for the biocentric individualist, even if holistic entities like species and ecosystems have enormous value, this value is still only instrumental. Environmentalists, it is claimed, tend to think that such entities have intrinsic value rather than merely instrumental value, and thus environmentalists tend to think more like holists.

I think this version of the "inadequacy" charge misconstrues one of the central questions of envi-

ronmental ethics. As environmental philosophers, we should not think of ourselves as focusing on the question: What do environmentalists *in fact* think has intrinsic value? Rather, we should be asking: What *should* we think has intrinsic value? Or, what do we *have good reasons* to think has intrinsic value? Defining an "adequate" environmental ethic as one that matches the pre-theoretic intuitions of self-professed environmentalists turns the discipline of environmental ethics into a kind of moral anthropology rather than a reasoned search for truth. In this essay, I have not developed a case against environmental holism, but the arguments of this section do show that biocentric individualism cannot be summarily dismissed as impracticable, either generally or in regard to environmental policy specifically.

CONCLUSION

My larger goal in this essay has been to show that one need not be soft-headed to think that it matters, morally speaking, how we treat plants. It would, in my judgment, be unreasonable to obsess on the microbes one's immune system is killing every day or on how one's dinner vegetables were dealt their death-blows, but it is not irrational to think that it is good to save the life of plants and non-conscious animals when one can. Good arguments can be given for thinking this, and someone who thinks this can consistently live a good human life.

And, of course, if it is reasonable to think that plants' lives have intrinsic value, then it was not irrational for me to feel at least a little bit guilty about killing that maple seedling unnecessarily.

SOURCES CITED

- Comstock, Gary. "Might Morality Require Veganism?" Special issue of *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 7, no. 1 (1994).
- Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1903.

120 ENVIRONMENTAL HOLISM

Schweitzer, Albert. *The Philosophy of Civilization*. New York: Macmillan, 1955.

Taylor, Paul. "The Ethics of Respect for Nature." *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 197–218.

Taylor, Paul. *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Varnier, Gary E. *In Nature's Interests? Interests, Animal Rights, and Environmental Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Williams, Bernard. *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Williams, Bernard. *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

NOTES

1. Strictly speaking, my view is that the *satisfaction* of interests creates intrinsic value, but in this essay I speak interchangeably of "the value of various interests," "the value of various interests' satisfaction," and "the value created by the satisfaction of various interests."

2. The issue is further complicated by the phenomenon of convergent evolution—some invertebrates could have evolved coping strategies that most other invertebrates have not. In particular, cephalopods (octopus, squid, and cuttlefish) may have evolved consciousness of pain and cognitive capacities that other invertebrates lack but most or all vertebrates have.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

A Biocentrist Strikes Back

James P. Sterba*

Biocentrists are criticized (1) for being biased in favor of the human species, (2) for basing their view on an ecology that is now widely challenged, and (3) for failing to reasonably distinguish the life that they claim has intrinsic value from the animate and inanimate things that they claim lack intrinsic value. In this paper, I show how biocentrism can be defended against these three criticisms, thus permitting biocentrists to justifiably appropriate the salutation, "Let the life force (or better the ethical demands of life) be with you."

It is difficult to be a supporter of biocentrism these days with all the criticism that has come its way. First of all, biocentrists are criticized for failing to state their view in such a way that it is not biased in favor of the human species.¹ Second, they are criticized for following Ado Leopold and basing their view on an ecology that regards ecosystems as tending toward stability and harmony—an ecology that is now widely challenged.² Third, biocentrists are criticized for failing to reasonably distinguish the life they claim has intrinsic value from the animate and inanimate things they claim lack intrinsic value.³ Accordingly, one might think that it would be best, as critics have urged, to abandon biocentrism altogether in favor a hierarchical or anthropocentric view. In this paper, however, I show that biocentrism can be defended against these three criticisms and, therefore, need not be abandoned. Specifically, I do so by developing a set of environmental principles that (1) are clearly not biased in favor of human species, (2) can adjust to changes in ecological science and (3) can reasonably distinguish what has intrinsic value from what doesn't. If I am right that biocentrists can adequately defend themselves against their critics, then the ethical demands of life will appear to be much stronger than many environmental philosophers have thought.

* Department of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556. Sterba has published seventeen books and over 150 articles. Among his recent publications are *Earth Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1994), *Contemporary Social and Political Philosophy* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1995), *Morality in Practice*, 5th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1997), and most recently *Justice for Here and Now* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The author thanks William Aiken, Michael DePaul, Robert Goodland, Dale Jameson, Val Plumwood, Ernest Partridge, Kenneth Sayre, Laura Westra, and the anonymous reviewers of this journal, Sara Ebenreck and Scott Lehmann, for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

¹ See William French, "Against Biospherical Egalitarianism," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995): pp. 39–57.

² Kristin Shrader-Frechette, "Individualism, Holism and Environmental Ethics," *Ethics and the Environment* 1 (1996): 55–69; Ned Hettinger and Bill Troop, "Refocusing Ecocentrism: Deemphasizing Stability and Defending Wildness," *Environmental Ethics*, forthcoming.

³ Frederik Kaufman, "Machines, Sentience and the Scope of Morality," *Environmental Ethics* 16 (1994): 57–70.

According to their critics, biocentrists talk a lot about the equality of species, but when they turn to the practical applications of their view, time and time again, they show their bias in favor of the human species. For example, Arne Naess defends a form of biocentrism that is committed to biospherical egalitarianism—"the equal right of [all living things] to live and bloom."⁴ Yet when Naess gets around to discussing the practical applications of his view, he says that biospherical egalitarianism only holds in principle, and he rejects any interpretation of his view suggesting that "human needs should never have priority over non-human needs."⁵ Critics see this rejection as indicative of the attempt by biocentrists to have their cake and literally eat it too.

Similarly, Paul Taylor endorses a biocentric outlook on nature with a principle of species impartiality according to which

... every species counts as having the same value in the sense that, regardless of what species a living thing belongs to, it is deemed to be *prima facie* deserving of equal concern and consideration on the part of moral agents. . . . Species-impartiality . . . means regarding every entity that has a good of its own [humans, animals and plants] as possessing inherent worth—the same inherent worth, since none is superior to another.⁶

Nevertheless, when Taylor gets around to discussing the practical applications of his view, he allows that we can aggress against the basic interests of (wild) animals and plants even to meet nonbasic human needs provided that it is compatible with the attitude of respect for nature and provided that no alternative way of pursuing those nonbasic human needs would involve fewer wrongs.⁷ What is difficult to comprehend here is how aggression against the basic needs of nonhumans for the sake of meeting the nonbasic needs of humans can be compatible with the equality of species. The critics of biocentrism claim that it can't.

In earlier work, I too tried to defend biocentrism, particularly, a revision of Taylor's view, against this criticism, but I now think that my defense was wanting, in part, because the environmental principles I proposed were not general enough.⁸ As formulated, my principles still made reference to humans. They were not stated in a species-neutral way, and so at least gave the impression of being biased in favor of humans. I now think that I do better.

⁴ Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: An Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 167–68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁶ Paul Taylor, *Respect for Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 155.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 276–77.

⁸ "From Biocentric Individualism to Biocentric Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995): 191–207; "Reconciling Anthropocentric and Nonanthropocentric Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Values* 3 (1994): 229–44.

II

Biocentrists are well known for their commitment to the equality of species. Yet if this commitment is to be defensible, I claim that it needs to be understood by analogy with the equality of humans. Accordingly, just as we claim that humans are equal, and yet justifiably treat them differently, so too we should be able to claim that all species are equal, yet justifiably treat them differently. In human ethics, there are various interpretations that we give to human equality that allow for different treatment of humans. In ethical egoism, everyone is *equally at liberty* to pursue his or her own interests, but in this pursuit we are allowed always to prefer ourselves to others, who are understood to be like opponents in a competitive game. In libertarianism, everyone has an *equal right to liberty*; yet, although this right imposes some limits on the pursuit of self-interest, it is said to allow us to refrain from helping others in severe need. In welfare liberalism, everyone has an *equal right to welfare and to opportunity*, but these rights need not commit us to providing everyone with exactly the same resources. In socialism, everyone has an *equal right to self-development*, and although this right may commit us to providing everyone with something like the same resources, it still sanctions some degree of self-preference. Thus, just as there are various ways to interpret human equality that still allow us to treat humans differently, there can be various justifiable ways to interpret species equality that still allow species to be treated differently.

One could interpret species equality in a very strong sense, analogous to the interpretation of equality found in socialism. However, the kind of species equality that I wish to defend is more akin to the equality found in welfare liberalism or in libertarianism than to the equality found in socialism with respect to the degree of preference that it allows for oneself and the members of one's own species.⁹ I maintain that we can justify such preference, in part, on grounds of limited defense. Accordingly, I propose the following two principles, one concerning defense and one concerning nondefense, that apply to all agents who are capable of understanding and acting on them:

The principle of defense that permits actions in defense of both basic and nonbasic needs against the aggression of others, even if it necessitates killing or harming those others, unless prohibited.¹⁰

⁹ Strictly speaking, not to treat humans as superior overall to other living beings is to treat them as either equal overall, or inferior overall, to other living beings, but I am using equal overall to include both of these possibilities since neither possibility involves the domination of nonhuman nature, and, moreover, the latter possibility is an unlikely course of action for humans to take.

¹⁰ The relevant actions here can be prohibited either by the principle of nondefense or by the principle of nonaggression which I discuss subsequently.

The principle of nondefense that prohibits defending nonbasic needs against the aggression of others that is undertaken as the only way to meet basic needs, if one can reasonably expect a comparable degree of altruistic forbearance from those others.

The principle of defense allows the members of a species to defend themselves and others from harmful aggression first against their persons and the persons of others to whom they are committed or happen to care about, and second against their justifiably held property and the justifiably held property of others to whom they are committed or happen to care about.

This principle is analogous to the principle of self-defense that applies in human ethics¹¹ and permits actions in defense of oneself or other human beings against harmful human aggression. In the case of human aggression, however, it is sometimes possible to effectively defend oneself and other human beings by first suffering the aggression and then securing adequate compensation later. Because in the case of nonhuman aggression by the members of other species with which we are familiar, such an approach is unlikely to work, justifying more harmful preventive actions such as killing a rabid dog or swatting a mosquito, potentially carrying disease. There are simply more ways to effectively stop aggressive humans than there are to effectively stop aggressive nonhumans.

Yet, there is a limit to the degree of defense that is justified. Defending nonbasic needs against the aggression of others that is undertaken as the only way to meet basic needs is prohibited if you can reasonably expect a comparable degree of altruistic forbearance from those others. In the case of human ethics, we can see how this type of aggression can be justified when the poor, who have exhausted all the other means that are legitimately available to them, take from the surplus possessions of the rich just what they need to meet their basic needs. Expressed in terms of an ideal of negative liberty endorsed by libertarians, the justification for this aggression is the priority of the liberty of the poor not to be interfered with when taking from the surplus possessions of the rich what they require to meet their basic needs over the liberty of the rich not to be interfered with when using their surplus for luxury purposes.¹² Expressed in terms of an ideal of fairness endorsed by welfare liberals, the justification for this aggression is the right to welfare that the needy have against those with a surplus. Expressed in terms of an ideal of equality endorsed by socialists, the justification for this aggression is the right that everyone has to equal self-development.

The principle of nondefense is simply a species-neutral generalization of this justification for aggression that is found in human ethics. The principle of

¹¹ By human ethics, I simply mean those forms of ethics that assume, without argument, that only human beings count morally.

¹² For a detailed discussion of this argument, see my article "From Liberty to Welfare," *Ethics* 104 (1994): 64–98.

defense and the principle of nondefense together, therefore, express the grounds of limited defense for preferring oneself and the members of one's own species over other species that is consistent with the equality of species.

A preference for oneself and the members of one's own species, however, can also be justified on grounds of preservation. Accordingly, we have the following two principles that apply to all agents who are capable of understanding and acting on them:

The principle of (aggression for) preservation that permits aggression when necessary against the basic needs of others for the sake of basic needs unless prohibited.

The principle of nonaggression that prohibits aggression against the basic needs of others either (1) to meet nonbasic needs or (2) even to meet basic needs if one can reasonably expect a comparable degree of altruistic forbearance from those others.

Needs, in general, if not satisfied, lead to lacks or deficiencies with respect to various standards. The basic needs of humans, if not satisfied, lead to lacks or deficiencies with respect to a standard of a decent life. The basic needs of animals and plants, if not satisfied, lead to lacks or deficiencies with respect to a standard of a healthy life.¹³ The means necessary for meeting the basic needs of humans can vary widely from society to society. By contrast, the means necessary for meeting the basic needs of particular species of animals and plants are more invariant. Of course, while only some needs can be clearly classified as basic, and others are clearly classified as nonbasic, there still are other needs that are more difficult to classify. Yet, the fact that not every need can be clearly classified as either basic or nonbasic—as is true of a whole range of such dichotomous concepts as moral/immoral, legal/illegal, living/nonliving, human/nonhuman—should not immobilize us from acting at least with respect to clear cases.¹⁴

In human ethics, there is no principle that is strictly analogous to the principle of (aggression for) preservation. There is a principle of self-preservation in human ethics that permits actions that are necessary for meeting one's own basic needs or the basic needs of other people, even if these actions require failing to meet (through an act of omission) the basic needs of still other people. For example, we can use our resources to feed ourselves and our family, even

¹³ The difference between a standard of a decent life and a standard of a healthy life is, however, only one of degree. A standard of a decent life emphasizes the cultural and social dimensions of basic needs while a standard of a healthy life emphasizes their physical and biological dimensions.

¹⁴ Moreover, this kind of fuzziness in the application of the distinction between basic and nonbasic needs is characteristic of the application of virtually all our classificatory concepts. and so is not an objection to its usefulness.

if doing so necessitates failing to meet the basic needs of people in other countries. However, in general, we don't have a principle that allows us to aggress against (through an act of commission) the basic needs of some people in order to meet our own basic needs or the basic needs of other people to whom we are committed or happen to care about. Actually, the closest we come to permitting aggressing against the basic needs of other people in order to meet our own basic needs or the basic needs of people to whom we are committed or happen to care about is our acceptance of the outcome of life and death struggles in lifeboat cases, where no one has an antecedent right to the available resources. For example, if you had to fight off others in order to secure the last place in a lifeboat for yourself or for a member of your family, we might say that you justifiably aggressed against the basic needs of those whom you fought to meet your own basic needs or the basic needs of the member of your family.¹⁵

Nevertheless, survival requires a principle of preservation that permits aggressing against the basic needs of at least some other living things whenever doing so is necessary to meet one's own basic needs or the basic needs of others whom one happens to care about. Here there are two possibilities. The first is a principle of preservation that allows one to aggress against the basic needs of anyone to obtain basic needs. The second is the principle of preservation, given above, that allows one to aggress against the basic needs of others to fulfill basic needs, unless (when the principle of nonaggression applies) one can reasonably expect a comparable degree of altruistic forbearance from those others. The first principle does not place any limit on whom one can aggress against to satisfy basic needs, and thus it permits even cannibalism provided that it serves to meet basic needs. In contrast, the second principle (when the principle of nonaggression applies) does place a limit on whom one can aggress against to obtain basic needs by prohibiting aggression against those from whom one can reasonably expect a comparable degree of altruistic forbearance. Moreover, because those from whom one can reasonably expect a comparable degree of altruistic forbearance normally turn out to be members of one's own species, the principle of (aggression for) preservation together with its allied principle of nonaggression sanctions a certain preference for the members of one's own species.¹⁶

But is this degree of preference for the members of one's own species compatible with the equality of species? Of course, it is theoretically possible to interact with the members of one's own species on the basis of the first principle of preservation considered above—the one that permits even cannibalism as a means for meeting basic needs. In the case of humans, adopting

¹⁵ It is important to recognize here that we also have a strong obligation to prevent lifeboat cases from arising in the first place.

¹⁶ This is true not only of humans but also of other nonhuman species with which we are familiar who are also capable of altruistic forbearance. I have added the qualification "normally" here because we know that, for example, that humans sometimes enter into a relationship of reciprocal altruism, with the members of other species such as dogs and horses.

such a principle would clearly reduce the degree of predation of humans on other species, and so would be of some benefit to other species. Yet, implicit nonaggression pacts based on a reasonable expectation of a comparable degree of altruistic forbearance from fellow humans have been enormously beneficial and probably were necessary for the survival of the human species. Thus, it is difficult to see how humans can be justifiably required to forgo such benefits.¹⁷ Moreover, to require humans to extend these benefits to the members of all species would, in effect, be to require humans to be saints, and surely morality is not in the business of requiring anyone to be a saint. Given then that this greater altruism cannot be morally required, the degree of preference for the members of one's own species sanctioned by the principle of (aggression for) preservation together with its allied principle of nonaggression would be morally justified.¹⁸

Nevertheless, preference for the members of one's own species can go beyond bounds, and the bounds that are compatible with the equality of species are captured by the first requirement of the principle of nonaggression, which prohibits aggressing against basic needs for the sake of nonbasic needs.¹⁹ This requirement is needed to give substance to the claim that the members of all species are equal. One can no more consistently claim that the members of all species are equal, yet aggress against the basic needs of the members of some species whenever doing so serves one's own nonbasic or luxury needs, or the nonbasic or luxury needs of others than we can consistently claim that all humans are equal, yet aggress against the basic needs of some humans whenever doing so serves our nonbasic or luxury needs or the nonbasic or luxury needs of other humans.²⁰ Consequently, if equality of species is to mean anything, it must be the case that the basic needs of members of species are protected against

¹⁷ With respect to humans who lack the capacity for reciprocal altruism, the compassion of fellow humans and the difficulty of distinguishing them from other humans who have that capacity provide sufficient grounds for extending to them the same protections as are given to other humans. I owe this point to Mary Russo.

¹⁸ It should be pointed out that the principle of (aggression for) preservation must be implemented in a way that causes the least harm possible, which means that, other things being equal, basic needs should be met by aggressing against nonsentient living beings rather than against sentient living beings so as to avoid the pain and suffering that would otherwise be inflicted on sentient beings.

¹⁹ It should also be pointed out that the principle of (aggression for) preservation does not support an unlimited right of procreation. In fact, the theory of justice presupposed here gives priority to the basic needs of existing beings over the basic needs of future possible beings, and this priority should effectively limit (human) procreation. Nor does the principle of (aggression for) preservation allow humans to aggress against the basic needs of animals and plants even to meet their own basic needs when those needs could effectively be met by utilizing available human surplus resources:

²⁰ Of course, libertarians have claimed that we can recognize that people have equal basic rights while, in fact, failing to meet, but not aggressing against, the basic needs of other human beings. However, I have argued in "From Liberty to Welfare" that this claim is mistaken.

aggressive actions which only serve to meet nonbasic needs, as demanded by the first requirement of the principle of nonaggression.²¹ Another way to put the central claim here is to claim that equality of species rules out domination, where domination means aggressing against the basic needs of the members of some species for the sake of satisfying the nonbasic needs of the members of other species.

Finally, we need one more principle to deal with violations of the above four principles. Accordingly, I propose the principle of rectification, which requires compensation and reparation when the other principles have been violated. Obviously, this principle is somewhat vague, but for those who are willing to abide by the other four principles, it should be possible to remedy this vagueness in practice. Taken altogether, I claim, these five principles constitute a set of environmental principles that are clearly not biased in favor of the human species, and thus provide a defensible interpretation of commitment of biocentrists to the equality of species.

III

Yet, even if biocentrism can be provided with a set of environmental principles that are clearly not biased in favor of the human species, it still needs to be defended against the criticism that it is based on an ecological perspective that is now widely challenged. According to Aldo Leopold, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."²² Leopold's claim has been frequently quoted and endorsed by environmental philosophers. For example, according to J. Baird Callicott, "in the last analysis, the integrity, beauty, and stability of the biotic community is the measure of right and wrong actions affecting the environment."²³ According to Holmes Rolston, "The land ethic rests on the discovery of certain values—integrity, projective creativity, life support, community—already present in ecosystems, and it imposes an obligation to act so as to maintain these."²⁴ Such environmental ethics is based on the view of natural systems as integrated, stable wholes that are either at, or moving toward, mature equilibrium states.

²¹ It should be pointed out that although the principle of nonaggression prohibits aggressing against basic needs to serve nonbasic needs, the principle of defense permits defense of nonbasic needs against aggression of others. Thus, while one cannot legitimately aggress against others to meet nonbasic needs, one can legitimately defend nonbasic needs against the aggression of others.

²² Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949).

²³ J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 58.

²⁴ Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 288.

Recently, however, ecologists have come to challenge this view.²⁵ The more radical challengers argue that change and disturbance are the norm and that natural environments do not even typically tend toward balanced, stable, and integrated states. On the large scale, this view is evidenced by glacial and climatic changes that show little recurring pattern and ensure that over the long term, natural environments will remain in constant flux. Margaret Davis writes:

For the last 50 years or 500, or 1,000—as long as anyone would claim for “ecological time”—there has never been an interval when temperature was in a steady state with symmetrical fluctuations about a mean. . . . Only on the longest time scale, 100,000 years, is there a tendency toward cyclical variation, and the cycles are asymmetrical, with a mean much different from today.²⁶

On a smaller scale, this view is evidenced by fires, storms, floods, droughts, invasions of exotic species, and many other factors that continually modify natural environments in ways that do not create repeating patterns of return to the same equilibrium states. “Nature,” claims Donald Worster, “is fundamentally erratic, discontinuous and unpredictable. It is full of seemingly random events that elude models of how things are supposed to work.”²⁷ Obviously, this “ecology of disequilibrium” contrasts sharply with the “ecology of equilibrium” endorsed by Leopold.

What then are the implications for environmental ethics of these contrasting views of ecology? Clearly, the basic concern of environmental ethics is to determine the prerogatives of and constraints on moral agents in their relationship with other living beings, that is, what moral agents are permitted to do, and what they are not permitted to do with respect to other living beings.²⁸ Now the environmental principles that I set out above are just such an attempt to determine these prerogatives and constraints. The prerogatives, as captured by the principle of defense and the principle of (aggression for) preservation, specify when moral agents can justifiably pursue their own interests and the interests of those whom they care about. The constraints, as captured by the principle of nondefense and the principle of nonaggression, specify the justifiable constraints on moral agents in their pursuit of their own interests and the interests of those whom

²⁵ Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and David Ehrenfeld, “Ecosystem Health and Ecological Theories,” in Robert Costanza, Bryant Norton, and Benjamin Haskell, eds., *Ecosystem Health* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1992); R. P. McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology: Concepts and Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

²⁶ Margaret Bryan Davis, “Climatic Instability, Time Lags, and Community Disequilibrium,” in Hared Diamond and Ted J. Case, eds., *Community Ecology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 269.

²⁷ Donald Worster, “The Ecology of Order and Chaos,” *Environmental History Review* 14 (1990): 13.

²⁸ For the purposes of this paper, by *moral agent* I simply mean “agents that are capable of understanding and acting on principles like my environmental principles.”

they care about. Accordingly, as long as moral agents do not exceed these prerogatives or fail to observe these constraints, they will have behaved morally with respect to other living beings, including individual species, ecosystems, and the whole biotic community.

Of course, these principles do require a specification of the basic needs of living beings. Although establishing such a specification with respect to species and members of species may not be very difficult, it is certainly more difficult to do with respect to ecosystems and the whole biotic community, if it can be done at all. Moreover, it is just here that the difference between the ecology of equilibrium and the ecology of disequilibrium comes into play. Thus, if the ecology of disequilibrium is true, then normally no specific course of development is good for ecosystems or the whole biotic community, and, hence, in many cases, they cannot be benefited or harmed by the actions of moral agents. Hoping to avoid this conclusion, Callicott notes that human-caused perturbations of the environment such as industrial forestry and agriculture, the elimination of large predators, and drift-net fishing are far more frequent, widespread, and regularly occurring than are nonhuman-caused perturbations.²⁹ Accordingly, he offers a revised maxim for a land ethic: A thing is right when it tends to disturb the biotic community only at normal spatial and temporal scales. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.³⁰ But if the biotic community does not tend toward any equilibrium, as the ecology of disequilibrium maintains, and Callicott grants this point at least for the sake of argument, then it is difficult to see how normal perturbations can somehow be better for the biotic community than abnormal perturbations. To the contrary, it would seem that the biotic community would just be different under normal perturbations than under abnormal perturbations, not better off.

Nevertheless, even if the ecology of disequilibrium is true, and normally no specific course of development is good for ecosystems or the whole biotic community, it will still be the case that the actions of moral agents can significantly harm or benefit particular species or their members, and thus this possible effect of their actions has to be taken into account in assessing the morality of those actions. By contrast, if the ecology of equilibrium is true, then ecosystems and the whole biotic community can frequently be benefited or harmed by the actions of moral agents. But given that, in many cases, we seem to lack the knowledge of when this benefit or harm obtains, it follows that, in these cases, only the impact we have on particular species or their members can be taken into account in assessing the morality of our actions.³¹ Thus, it turns out that irrespective of whether an ecology of disequilibrium or an ecology of

²⁹ J. Baird Callicott, "Do Deconstructive Ecology and Sociobiology Undermine Leopold's Land Ethic?" *Environmental Ethics* 18 (1996): 369.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

³¹ To some extent, it was the difficulty ecologists had in specifying when ecosystems were in equilibrium that led them to endorse the ecology of disequilibrium.

equilibrium is true, in many cases, the same considerations would be taken into account in assessing the morality of the actions of moral agents. In time, the debate between these two ecological perspectives may well be resolved, but however it is resolved, it should leave the defensibility, if not the application, of biocentrism unaffected.

IV

Yet, even if their view is unaffected by the debate between the ecology of equilibrium and the ecology of disequilibrium, biocentrists still need to reasonably distinguish the life that they claim has intrinsic value from the animate and inanimate things that they claim lack intrinsic value. In order to do so, it is useful to get clear about what it means to claim that life of a certain sort has intrinsic value which inanimate and some animate things lack.

Here we need to distinguish at least two notions of intrinsic value. According to the first notion of intrinsic value, to say that *X* has intrinsic value is to say that *X* is good as an end for some agent *Y* as opposed to saying that *X* has instrumental value, which is to say that *X* is good as a means for some agent *Y*. According to the second notion of intrinsic value, to say that *X* has intrinsic value is to say that the good of *X* ought to constrain the way that others use *X* in pursuing their own interests.³² While the first notion of intrinsic value is the more familiar one, it is the second notion of intrinsic value that is more useful in this context. Thus, to say that certain living beings have intrinsic value is to say that the good of those living beings ought to constrain the way that others use them in pursuing their own interests. The actual constraints that are operative in this regard, I claim, are given by the above environmental principles.

Critics of biocentrism, however, can accept this analysis of intrinsic value. What they question is how biocentrists can reasonably distinguish the life they claim has intrinsic value from the animate and inanimate things they claim lack intrinsic value. In particular, these critics claim that biocentrists cannot reasonably distinguish the living things they claim have intrinsic value from machines and from various other kinds of living things, such as hearts and kidneys, which they claim lack intrinsic value. Since critics point out that machines, hearts, and kidneys can all be benefited and harmed, why should they not also have intrinsic value? Of course, if biocentrists were to allow that all these things have intrinsic value that would be the *reductio ad absurdum* of their position. Accordingly, biocentrists need to provide some way of reasonably distinguishing what they claim has intrinsic value from what they claim lacks intrinsic value.

Biocentrists have responded to this challenge in various ways. Paul Taylor

³² There is no opposing sense of "instrumental value" here.

claims that in addition to being capable of being benefited or harmed, a being must have a good of its own in order to have intrinsic value.³³ Taylor claims that machines and such living things as hearts and kidneys do not have a good of their own because their good is derived from the good of living beings whose good is not so derived.³⁴ Laurence Johnson responds in a similar, but more expansive, way, claiming that moral subjects are living systems in a persistent state of low entropy sustained by metabolic processes for accumulating energy whose organic unity and self-identity is maintained in equilibrium by homeostatic feedback processes.³⁵ Gary Varner takes a different approach, claiming that what characterizes living beings which have intrinsic value is that the capacities of these living beings arose by a process of natural selection.³⁶ According to Nicholas Agar, who builds on Varner's account, it is having capabilities that arose by natural selection together with having certain representational goals that characterize living beings that have intrinsic value.³⁷ In my earlier work, I argued that Taylor's account was a reasonable way of distinguishing what has intrinsic value from what doesn't, but now I have my doubts.³⁸

The problem with all of these accounts, as I now see it, is that they all involve a derivation of "values" from "facts" in such a way that we can always ask why these "facts" and not others are the grounds for the derivation.³⁹ Of course, animal liberationists, who hold that only sentient beings have intrinsic value, and most people, who I would say are anthropocentrists and hold that only humans or, more generally, rational beings have intrinsic value, face the same problem. But is there any way out of this problem? I think that there is.

To begin with, we need to recall that the basic concern of environmental ethics is to determine the prerogatives of and constraints on moral agents in their relationship with other living beings. The prerogatives specify the ways

³³ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, pp. 68–71 and p. 17.

³⁴ One might wonder whether, on Taylor's view, the theist's belief that human goodness has its source and exemplar in the goodness of God renders it impossible for the theist to reasonably hold that humans have a good of their own. Exploring this issue, however, would take us to far afield. Moreover, I hope to provide a characterization of what has intrinsic value that makes it easier to resolve this issue.

³⁵ Laurence Johnson, *A Morally Deep World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chap. 6. Johnson adapts this definition from Kenneth Sayre, *Cybernetics and the Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Humanities, 1996). See also Lawrence Johnson, "Toward the Moral Considerability of Species and Ecosystems," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): 147–57.

³⁶ Gary Varner, "Biological Functions and Biological Interests," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1990): 251–70.

³⁷ Nicholas Agar, "Valuing Species and Valuing Individuals," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995): 397–415.

³⁸ For this earlier argument, see "From Biocentric Individualism to Biocentric Pluralism."

³⁹ I am not objecting here to all attempts to derive, or better ground "values" on "facts" but just to the arbitrariness that seems to characterize the one under consideration. For a discussion of what good derivations or groundings of values would look like, see Kurt Baier, *The Rational and the Moral Order* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), chap. 1.

that moral agents can justifiably harm other living beings (the principles of defense and preservation) while the constraints specify the ways that moral agents cannot justifiably harm other living beings (the principles of nondefense and nonaggression). Moreover, when moral agents recognize beings as having intrinsic value, they simply recognize that these constraints apply to their interactions with them.

It is important to notice that the constraints specifying ways that moral agents should not harm other living beings are simply requirements that, under certain conditions, moral agents should leave other living beings alone, that is, not interfere with them. They are not requirements that moral agents do anything for other living beings. To generally require that moral agents do something (beneficial) for other living beings (except when rectification is required) is to require much more of them. It entails positive obligations to benefit other living beings, not just negative obligations not to harm them by interfering with them. In general, this would be to demand too much from moral agents, in effect, requiring them to be saints, and, as we have noted before, morality is not in the business of requiring moral agents to be saints. Accordingly, the general obligation of noninterference that moral agents have with respect to other living beings is fixed not so much by the nature of those other living beings (although they must be capable of being benefited and harmed in some non-derivative way), but rather by what constraints or requirements can be reasonably imposed on moral agents. Accordingly, we can see that those who benefit from the obligations that can be reasonably imposed on moral agents must have a certain independence to their lives; they must be able to get along on their own, without the help of others. In other words, they must have a good of their own.⁴⁰

Some living things, such as hearts and kidneys, don't have a good of their own in this sense, and; therefore, they won't benefit from simply being left alone. For example, hearts and kidneys require a certain kind of sustaining environment, and to demand that moral agents provide that kind of environment, when it is contrary to their interest to do so, is to impose a significantly demanding requirement on them. Of course, there is no problem when the heart or kidney is healthy and one's own, because in that case, one would almost surely want to preserve one's own heart or kidney. But when one's heart or kidney is diseased, or not one's own, one is under no positive moral obligation to preserve it as such.⁴¹ That would be to ask too much of moral agents. As a

⁴⁰ One notable exception to the requirement of independence are some species and subspecies of domesticated animals who have been made into beings who are dependent for their survival on humans. I contend that because of their historic interaction with these domesticated animals, humans have acquired a positive obligation to care for these animals provided certain mutually beneficial arrangements can be maintained. Such domestic animals also have intrinsic value (i.e., their good ought to constrain how others use them), but the reasons for their having this value derive from the way that they have been deprived of their independence by humans.

⁴¹ Moreover, to recognize a positive obligation to preserve living things, such as hearts and kidneys, also puts one in conflict with one's own good if it is the case that one's own heart or kidney is diseased or the good of other living beings if their hearts or kidneys are diseased.

moral agent, one's only general obligation to all living beings is simply not to interfere with them as specified by the principles of nondefense and nonaggression. But it is assumed here that the living beings who are standardly covered by these principles actually will benefit from such noninterference and, hence, that they do not additionally require for their survival positive support from moral agents who have no obligation to provide it.⁴² It is such living beings who have intrinsic value; it is such living beings whose good ought to constrain the way that moral agents pursue their own interests.⁴³

The same holds true for machines. It is not good for them to be left alone. They too need a sustaining environment. Yet moral agents are not under any positive obligation to provide such an environment. The only obligation moral agents have in this regard is an obligation, under certain conditions, not to interfere with beings who would benefit from such noninterference. To require that moral agents do more would be to require that moral agents do too much, since morality does not require that moral agents do more than can be reasonably expected of them.

Nevertheless, there is a further problem with machines, beyond their need for positive support, that undercuts the very possibility of moral agents having any obligations toward them. It is that, unlike living things, including hearts and kidneys, machines cannot be benefited and harmed except derivatively through their ability to serve the (instrumental) purposes of their creators or owners. Of course, we do say that a car needs an oil change or a fill up. Yet meeting such needs doesn't really benefit the car. Rather it usually benefits the owner of the car who is thereby provided with a more reliable means of transportation. Suppose the owner of the car wants to turn it into a work of modern art by judiciously applying a sledgehammer to it. Is the car thereby harmed? It is not clear that it is. Rather the car now serves the artistic needs of its owner and possibly others, thereby benefiting them in a new way. Moreover, in this new role, the car no longer needs oil changes and fill ups.⁴⁴

Of course, it is possible that machines could be constructed that are so self-sufficient and independent that it would make sense to talk about them as being benefited and harmed in their own right and as having a good of their own. We clearly have already been exposed to such machines in science fiction, the

However, this line of thought only shows that granting such a positive obligation leads to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the biocentrist's position. The qualification "as such" is added to allow for the possibility that one may have an obligation to preserve a particular heart or kidney if one should happen to have an obligation to preserve the person whose heart or kidney it is.

⁴² In the case of some species and subspecies of domesticated animals, however, there is a conditional obligation to provide positive support. See n. 41.

⁴³ It would be interesting to explore how this moral framework applies to disputed moral problems like abortion and euthanasia. My hope is that all disputants would find this moral framework acceptable and that the framework will also provide additional resources for resolving these problems.

⁴⁴ For further discussion, see Johnson, *A Morally Deep World*, p. 76.

creation of them in real life seems only to be a matter of time. At the moment, however, the machines that we actually deal with cannot be benefited or harmed except derivatively through their ability to serve the purposes of their creators or owners. As a consequence, the moral constraints of the principles of nondefense and nonaggression does not apply to them.

Accordingly, I have specified the class of those who have intrinsic value not primarily in terms of the factual characteristics of those who have it (although they must be capable of being benefited and harmed in a nonderivative sense), but rather in terms of what constraints or requirements can reasonably be imposed on moral agents in this regard.⁴⁵ This class is not a derivation of "values" from "facts" or of "ought" from "is" in which one can ask why these facts and not some others support the derivation. Rather it is a derivation of "values" from "values" or of "ought" from "ought" in which the necessity of the derivation can be displayed.

We can more clearly display this derivation as a two-step argument. First, we need a set of premises that limits the requirements of morality:

- (1a) The requirements of morality are not among the requirements that it is unreasonable to impose on moral agents.
- (2a) It is unreasonable to impose on moral agents a positive obligation to benefit all things capable of being benefited and harmed (which is required to extend intrinsic value to living things, such as hearts and kidneys, and to any machines that qualify).
- (3a) A positive obligation to benefit all things capable of being benefited and harmed is not a requirement of morality.

Second, we need a set of premises stating what the requirements of morality are:

- (1b) Morality imposes reasonable requirements on moral agents.
- (2b) The principles of defense, nondefense, preservation, nonaggression, and rectification, unlike the other alternatives, are reasonable to impose on all moral agents.
- (3b) The principles of defense, nondefense, preservation, nonaggression, and rectification are requirements of morality.

⁴⁵ Even the requirement that those who can be benefited or harmed in a nonderivative way must have a certain independence to their lives or a good of their own is, on my account, derived from what we can reasonably expect of moral agents.

Because the basic premises of this two-step argument—(1a) and (1b)—are widely accepted as fundamental characterizations of morality, and (1b), in fact, is the contrapositive of (1a), I think that the conclusions (3a) and (3b) can be seen to clearly follow.⁴⁶

Of course, a fuller statement of this two-step argument requires an elaboration of the considerations that I have advanced in this paper. Nevertheless, I think that I have said enough to indicate how biocentrists can meet the three basic criticisms that have been raised against them by providing a set of environmental principles that (1) are clearly not biased in favor of human species, (2) can adjust to changes in ecological science, and (3) can reasonably distinguish what has intrinsic value from what doesn't. By showing how biocentrists can strike back and answer these criticisms, I think that I have also provided grounds for allowing biocentrists to justifiably appropriate the salutation, "Let the life force (or better the ethical demands of life) be with you."

⁴⁶ For further discussion of these two fundamental characterizations of morality (1a) and (1b), see "From Liberty to Welfare."

Part IV
Virtue Ethics and Human Values



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments

Thomas E. Hill, Jr.*

The moral significance of preserving natural environments is not entirely an issue of rights and social utility, for a person's attitude toward nature may be importantly connected with virtues or human excellences. The question is, "What sort of person would destroy the natural environment—or even see its value solely in cost/benefit terms?" The answer I suggest is that willingness to do so may well reveal the absence of traits which are a natural basis for a proper humility, self-acceptance, gratitude, and appreciation of the good in others.

I

A wealthy eccentric bought a house in a neighborhood I know. The house was surrounded by a beautiful display of grass, plants, and flowers, and it was shaded by a huge old avocado tree. But the grass required cutting, the flowers needed tending, and the man wanted more sun. So he cut the whole lot down and covered the yard with asphalt. After all it was his property and he was not fond of plants.

It was a small operation, but it reminded me of the strip mining of large sections of the Appalachians. In both cases, of course, there were reasons for the destruction, and property rights could be cited as justification. But I could not help but wonder, "What sort of person would do a thing like that?"

Many Californians had a similar reaction when a recent governor defended the leveling of ancient redwood groves, reportedly saying, "If you have seen one redwood, you have seen them all."

Incidents like these arouse the indignation of ardent environmentalists and leave even apolitical observers with some degree of moral discomfort. The reasons for these reactions are mostly obvious. Uprooting the natural environment robs both present and future generations of much potential use and enjoyment. Animals too depend on the environment; and even if one does not value animals for their own sakes, their potential utility for us is incalculable. Plants are needed, of course, to replenish the atmosphere quite aside from their aesthetic value. These reasons for hesitating to destroy forests and gardens are

*Department of Philosophy, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90024. Hill's research interests include Kant's moral philosophy and current moral issues. The author thanks Gregory Kavka, Catherine Harlow, the participants at a colloquium at the University of Utah, and the referees for *Environmental Ethics*, Dale Jamieson and Donald Scherer, for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

not only the most obvious ones, but also the most persuasive for practical purposes. But, one wonders, is there nothing more behind our discomfort? Are we concerned solely about the potential use and enjoyment of the forests, etc., for ourselves, later generations, and perhaps animals? Is there not something else which disturbs us when we witness the destruction or even listen to those who would defend it in terms of cost/benefit analysis?

Imagine that in each of our examples those who would destroy the environment argue elaborately that, even considering future generations of human beings and animals, there are benefits in "replacing" the natural environment which outweigh the negative utilities which environmentalists cite.¹ No doubt we could press the argument on the facts, trying to show that the destruction is shortsighted and that its defenders have underestimated its potential harm or ignored some pertinent rights or interests. But is this all we could say? Suppose we grant, for a moment, that the utility of destroying the redwoods, forests, and gardens is equal to their potential for use and enjoyment by nature lovers and animals. Suppose, further, that we even grant that the pertinent human rights and animal rights, if any, are evenly divided for and against destruction. Imagine that we also concede, for argument's sake, that the forests contain no potentially useful endangered species of animals and plants. Must we then conclude that there is no further cause for moral concern? Should we then feel morally indifferent when we see the natural environment uprooted?

II

Suppose we feel that the answer to these questions should be negative. Suppose, in other words, we feel that our moral discomfort when we confront the destroyers of nature is not fully explained by our belief that they have miscalculated the best use of natural resources or violated rights in exploiting them. Suppose, in particular, we sense that part of the problem is that the natural environment is being viewed exclusively as a natural *resource*. What could be the ground of such a feeling? That is, what is there in our system of normative principles and values that could account for our remaining moral dissatisfaction?²

¹ When I use the expression "the natural environment," I have in mind the sort of examples with which I began. For some purposes it is important to distinguish cultivated gardens from forests, virgin forests from replenished ones, irreplaceable natural phenomena from the replaceable, and so on; but these distinctions, I think, do not affect my main points here. There is also a broad sense, as Hume and Mill noted, in which all that occurs, miracles aside, is "natural." In this sense, of course, strip mining is as natural as a beaver cutting trees for his dam, and, as parts of nature, we cannot destroy the "natural" environment but only alter it. As will be evident, I shall use *natural* in a narrower, more familiar sense.

² This paper is intended as a preliminary discussion in *normative* ethical theory (as opposed to *metaethics*). The task, accordingly, is the limited, though still difficult, one of articulating the possible basis in our beliefs and values for certain particular moral judgments. Questions of ultimate justification are set aside. What makes the task difficult and challenging is not that conclusive proofs from the foundation of morality are attempted; it is rather that the particular judgments to be explained seem at first not to fall under the most familiar moral principles (e.g., utilitarianism, respect for rights).

Some may be tempted to seek an explanation by appeal to the interests, or even the rights, of plants. After all, they may argue, we only gradually came to acknowledge the moral importance of all human beings, and it is even more recently that consciences have been aroused to give full weight to the welfare (and rights?) of animals. The next logical step, it may be argued, is to acknowledge a moral requirement to take into account the interests (and rights?) of plants. The problem with the strip miners, redwood cutters, and the like, on this view, is not just that they ignore the welfare and rights of people and animals; they also fail to give due weight to the survival and health of the plants themselves.

The temptation to make such a reply is understandable if one assumes that all moral questions are exclusively concerned with whether *acts* are right or wrong, and that this, in turn, is determined entirely by how the acts impinge on the rights and interests of those directly affected. On this assumption, if there is cause for moral concern, some right or interest has been neglected; and if the rights and interests of human beings and animals have already been taken into account, then there must be some other pertinent interests, for example, those of plants. A little reflection will show that the assumption is mistaken; but, in any case, the conclusion that plants have rights or morally relevant interests is surely untenable. We do speak of what is "good for" plants, and they can "thrive" and also be "killed." But this does not imply that they have "interests" in any morally relevant sense. Some people apparently believe that plants grow better if we talk to them, but the idea that the plants suffer and enjoy, desire and dislike, etc., is clearly outside the range of both common sense and scientific belief. The notion that the forests should be preserved to avoid *hurting* the trees or because they have a *right* to life is not part of a widely shared moral consciousness, and for good reason.³

Another way of trying to explain our moral discomfort is to appeal to certain religious beliefs. If one believes that all living things were created by a God who cares for them and entrusted us with the use of plants and animals only for limited purposes, then one has a reason to avoid careless destruction of the forests, etc., quite aside from their future utility. Again, if one believes that a divine force is immanent in all nature, then too one might have reason to care

³ I assume here that having a right presupposes having interests in a sense which in turn presupposes a capacity to desire, suffer, etc. Since my main concern lies in another direction, I do not argue the point, but merely note that some regard it as debatable. See, for example, W. Murray Hunt, "Are *Mere Things* Morally Considerable?" *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 59-65; Kenneth E. Goodpaster, "On Stopping at Everything," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 288-94; Joel Feinberg, "The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations," in William Blackstone, ed., *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974), pp. 43-68; Tom Regan, "Feinberg on What Sorts of Beings Can Have Rights," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1976): 485-98; Robert Elliot, "Regan on the Sort of Beings that Can Have Rights," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1978): 701-05; Scott Lehmann, "Do Wildernesses Have Rights?" *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1981): 129-46.

for more than sentient things. But such arguments require strong and controversial premises, and, I suspect, they will always have a restricted audience.

Early in this century, due largely to the influence of G. E. Moore, another point of view developed which some may find promising.⁴ Moore introduced, or at least made popular, the idea that certain states of affairs are intrinsically valuable—not just valued, but valuable, and not necessarily because of their effects on sentient beings. Admittedly Moore came to believe that in fact the only intrinsically valuable things were conscious experiences of various sorts,⁵ but this restriction was not inherent in the idea of intrinsic value. The intrinsic goodness of something, he thought, was an objective, nonrelational property of the thing, like its texture or color, but not a property perceivable by sense perception or detectable by scientific instruments. In theory at least, a single tree thriving alone in a universe without sentient beings, and even without God, could be intrinsically valuable. Since, according to Moore, our duty is to maximize intrinsic value, his theory could obviously be used to argue that we have reason not to destroy natural environments independently of how they affect human beings and animals. The survival of a forest might have worth beyond its worth *to* sentient beings.

This approach, like the religious one, may appeal to some but is infested with problems. There are, first, the familiar objections to intuitionism, on which the theory depends. Metaphysical and epistemological doubts about nonnatural, intuited properties are hard to suppress, and many have argued that the theory rests on a misunderstanding of the words *good*, *valuable*, and the like.⁶ Second, even if we try to set aside these objections and think in Moore's terms, it is far from obvious that everyone would agree that the existence of forests, etc., is intrinsically valuable. The test, says Moore, is what we would say when we imagine a universe with just the thing in question, without any effects or accompaniments, and then we ask, "Would its existence be better than its nonexistence?" Be careful, Moore would remind us, not to construe this question as, "Would you *prefer* the existence of that universe to its nonexistence?" The question is, "Would its existence have the objective, nonrelational property, intrinsic goodness?"

Now even among those who have no worries about whether this really makes sense, we might well get a diversity of answers. Those prone to destroy natural environments will doubtless give one answer, and nature lovers will likely give another. When an issue is as controversial as the one at hand, intuition is a poor arbiter.

⁴ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903); *Ethics* (London: H. Holt, 1912).

⁵ G. E. Moore, "Is Goodness a Quality?" *Philosophical Papers* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959), pp. 95–97.

⁶ See, for example, P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954).

The problem, then, is this. We want to understand what underlies our moral uneasiness at the destruction of the redwoods, forests, etc., even apart from the loss of these as resources for human beings and animals. But I find no adequate answer by pursuing the questions, "Are rights or interests of plants neglected?" "What is God's will on the matter?" and "What is the intrinsic value of the existence of a tree or forest?" My suggestion, which is in fact the main point of this paper, is that we look at the problem from a different perspective. That is, let us turn for a while from the effort to find reasons why certain *acts* destructive of natural environments are morally wrong to the ancient task of articulating our ideals of human excellence. Rather than argue directly with destroyers of the environment who say, "Show me why what I am doing is *immoral*," I want to ask, "What sort of person would want to do what they propose?" The point is not to skirt the issue with an *ad hominem*, but to raise a different moral question, for even if there is no convincing way to show that the destructive acts are wrong (independently of human and animal use and enjoyment), we may find that the willingness to indulge in them reflects the absence of human traits that we admire and regard morally important.

This strategy of shifting questions may seem more promising if one reflects on certain analogous situations. Consider, for example, the Nazi who asks, in all seriousness, "Why is it wrong for me to make lampshades out of human skin—provided, of course, I did not myself kill the victims to get the skins?" We would react more with shock and disgust than with indignation, I suspect, because it is even more evident that the question reveals a defect in the questioner than that the proposed act is itself immoral. Sometimes we may not regard an act wrong at all though we see it as reflecting something objectionable about the person who does it. Imagine, for example, one who laughs spontaneously to himself when he reads a newspaper account of a plane crash that kills hundreds. Or, again, consider an obsequious grandson who, having waited for his grandmother's inheritance with mock devotion, then secretly spits on her grave when at last she dies. Spitting on the grave may have no adverse consequences and perhaps it violates no rights. The moral uneasiness which it arouses is explained more by our view of the agent than by any conviction that what he did was immoral. Had he hesitated and asked, "Why shouldn't I spit on her grave?" it seems more fitting to ask him to reflect on the sort of person he is than to try to offer reasons why he should refrain from spitting.

III

What sort of person, then, would cover his garden with asphalt, strip mine a wooded mountain, or level an irreplaceable redwood grove? Two sorts of answers, though initially appealing, must be ruled out. The first is that persons who would destroy the environment in these ways are either shortsighted, underestimating the harm they do, or else are too little concerned for the

well-being of other people. Perhaps too they have insufficient regard for animal life. But these considerations have been set aside in order to refine the controversy. Another tempting response might be that we count it a moral virtue, or at least a human ideal, to love nature. Those who value the environment only for its utility must not really love nature and so in this way fall short of an ideal. But such an answer is hardly satisfying in the present context, for what is at issue is *why* we feel moral discomfort at the activities of those who admittedly value nature only for its utility. That it is ideal to care for nonsentient nature beyond its possible use is really just another way of expressing the general point which is under controversy.

What is needed is some way of showing that this ideal is connected with other virtues, or human excellences, not in question. To do so is difficult and my suggestions, accordingly, will be tentative and subject to qualification. The main idea is that, though indifference to nonsentient nature does not *necessarily* reflect the absence of virtues, it often signals the absence of certain traits which we want to encourage because they are, in most cases, a natural basis for the development of certain virtues. It is often thought, for example, that those who would destroy the natural environment must lack a proper appreciation of their place in the natural order, and so must either be ignorant or have too little humility. Though I would argue that this is not necessarily so, I suggest that, given certain plausible empirical assumptions, their attitude may well be rooted in ignorance, a narrow perspective, inability to see things as important apart from themselves and the limited groups they associate with, or reluctance to accept themselves as natural beings. Overcoming these deficiencies will not guarantee a proper moral humility, but for most of us it is probably an important psychological preliminary. Later I suggest, more briefly, that indifference to nonsentient nature typically reveals absence of either aesthetic sensibility or a disposition to cherish what has enriched one's life and that these, though not themselves moral virtues, are a natural basis for appreciation of the good in others and gratitude.⁷

Consider first the suggestion that destroyers of the environment lack an appreciation of their place in the universe.⁸ Their attention, it seems, must be

⁷ The issues I raise here, though perhaps not the details of my remarks, are in line with Aristotle's view of moral philosophy, a view revitalized recently by Philippa Foot's *Virtue and Vice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), Alastair McIntyre's *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1981), and James Wallace's *Virtues and Vices* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), and other works. For other reflections on relationships between character and natural environments, see John Rodman, "The Liberation of Nature," *Inquiry* (1976):83-131 and L. Reinhardt, "Some Gaps in Moral Space: Reflections on Forests and Feelings," in Mannison, McRobbie, and Routley, eds., *Environmental Philosophy* (Canberra: Australian National University Research School of Social Sciences, 1980).

⁸ Though for simplicity I focus upon those who do strip mining, etc., the argument is also applicable to those whose utilitarian calculations lead them to preserve the redwoods, mountains, etc., but who care for only sentient nature for its own sake. Similarly the phrase "indifferent to nature" is meant to encompass those who are indifferent *except* when considering its benefits to people and animals.

focused on parochial matters, on what is, relatively speaking, close in space and time. They seem not to understand that we are a speck on the cosmic scene, a brief stage in the evolutionary process, only one among millions of species on Earth, and an episode in the course of human history. Of course, they know that there are stars, fossils, insects, and ancient ruins; but do they have any idea of the complexity of the processes that led to the natural world as we find it? Are they aware how much the forces at work within their own bodies are like those which govern all living things and even how much they have in common with inanimate bodies? Admittedly scientific knowledge is limited and no one can master it all; but could one who had a broad and deep understanding of his place in nature really be indifferent to the destruction of the natural environment?

This first suggestion, however, may well provoke a protest from a sophisticated anti-environmentalist.⁹ "Perhaps *some* may be indifferent to nature from ignorance," the critic may object, "but *I* have studied astronomy, geology, biology, and biochemistry, and I still unashamedly regard the nonsentient environment as simply a resource for our use. It should not be wasted, of course, but what should be preserved is decidable by weighing long-term costs and benefits." "Besides," our critic may continue, "as philosophers you should know the old Humean formula, 'You cannot derive an *ought* from an *is*.' All the facts of biology, biochemistry, etc., do not entail that I ought to love nature or want to preserve it. What one understands is one thing; what one values is something else. Just as nature lovers are not necessarily scientists, those indifferent to nature are not necessarily ignorant."

Although the environmentalist may concede the critic's logical point, he may well argue that, as a matter of fact, increased understanding of nature tends to heighten people's concern for its preservation. If so, despite the objection, the suspicion that the destroyers of the environment lack deep understanding of nature is not, in most cases, unwarranted, but the argument need not rest here.

The environmentalist might amplify his original idea as follows: "When I said that the destroyers of nature do not appreciate their place in the universe, I was not speaking of intellectual understanding alone, for, after all, a person can *know* a catalog of facts without ever putting them together and seeing vividly the whole picture which they form. To see oneself as just one part of nature is to look at oneself and the world from a certain perspective which is quite different from being able to recite detailed information from the natural

⁹ For convenience I use the labels *environmentalist* and *anti-environmentalist* (or *critic*) for the opposing sides in the rather special controversy I have raised. Thus, for example, my "environmentalist" not only favors conserving the forests, etc., but finds something objectionable in wanting to destroy them even aside from the costs to human beings and animals. My "anti-environmentalist" is not simply one who wants to destroy the environment; he is a person who has no qualms about doing so independent of the adverse effects on human beings and animals.

sciences. What the destroyers of nature lack is this perspective, not particular information.”

Again our critic may object, though only after making some concessions: “All right,” he may say, “*some* who are indifferent to nature may lack the cosmic perspective of which you speak, but again there is no *necessary* connection between this failing, if it is one, and any particular evaluative attitude toward nature. In fact, different people respond quite differently when they move to a wider perspective. When *I* try to picture myself vividly as a brief, transitory episode in the course of nature, I simply get depressed. Far from inspiring me with a love of nature, the exercise makes me sad and hostile. You romantics think only of poets like Wordsworth and artists like Turner, but you should consider how differently Omar Khayyam responded when he took your wider perspective. His reaction, when looking at his life from a cosmic viewpoint, was ‘Drink up, for tomorrow we die.’ Others respond in an almost opposite manner with a joyless Stoic resignation, exemplified by the poet who pictures the wise man, at the height of personal triumph, being served a magnificent banquet, and then consummating his marriage to his beloved, all the while reminding himself, ‘Even this shall pass away.’”¹⁰ In sum, the critic may object, “Even if one should try to see oneself as one small transitory part of nature, doing so does not dictate any particular normative attitude. Some may come to love nature, but others are moved to live for the moment; some sink into sad resignation; others get depressed or angry. So indifference to nature is not necessarily a sign that a person fails to look at himself from the larger perspective.”

The environmentalist might respond to this objection in several ways. He might, for example, argue that even though some people who see themselves as part of the natural order remain indifferent to nonsentient nature, this is not a common reaction. Typically, it may be argued, as we become more and more aware that we are parts of the larger whole we come to value the whole independently of its effect on ourselves. Thus, despite the possibilities the critic raises, indifference to nonsentient nature is still in most cases a sign that a person fails to see himself as part of the natural order.

If someone challenges the empirical assumption here, the environmentalist might develop the argument along a quite different line. The initial idea, he may remind us, was that those who would destroy the natural environment fail to *appreciate* their place in the natural order. “Appreciating one’s place” is not simply an intellectual appreciation. It is also an attitude, reflecting what one values as well as what one knows. When we say, for example, that both the servile and the arrogant person fail to *appreciate* their place in a society of equals, we do not mean simply that they are ignorant of certain empirical

¹⁰ “Even this shall pass away,” by Theodore Tilton, in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, ed. Hazel Felleman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1936).

facts, but rather that they have certain objectionable attitudes about their importance relative to other people. Similarly, to fail to appreciate one's place in nature is not merely to lack knowledge or breadth of perspective, but to take a certain attitude about what matters. A person who *understands* his place in nature but still views nonsentient nature merely as a resource takes the attitude that nothing is *important* but human beings and animals. Despite first appearances, he is not so much like the pre-Copernican astronomers who made the intellectual error of treating the Earth as the "center of the universe" when they made their calculations. He is more like the racist who, though well aware of other races, treats all races but his own as insignificant.

So construed, the argument appeals to the common idea that awareness of nature typically has, and should have, a humbling effect. The Alps, a storm at sea, the Grand Canyon, towering redwoods, and "the starry heavens above" move many a person to remark on the comparative insignificance of our daily concerns and even of our species, and this is generally taken to be a quite fitting response.¹¹ What seems to be missing, then, in those who understand nature but remain unmoved is a proper humility.¹² Absence of proper humility is not the same as selfishness or egoism, for one can be devoted to self-interest while still viewing one's own pleasures and projects as trivial and unimportant.¹³ And one can have an exaggerated view of one's own importance while grandly sacrificing for those one views as inferior. Nor is the lack of humility identical with belief that one has power and influence, for a person can be quite puffed up about himself while believing that the foolish world will never acknowledge him. The humility we miss seems not so much a belief about one's relative effectiveness and recognition as an attitude which measures the importance of things independently of their relation to oneself or to some narrow group with which one identifies. A paradigm of a person who lacks humility is the self-important emperor who grants status to his family because it is *his*, to his subordinates because *he* appointed them, and to his country because *he* chooses to glorify it. Less extreme but still lacking proper humility is the elitist who counts events significant solely in proportion to how they affect his class. The suspicion about those who would destroy the environment, then, is that what they count important is too narrowly confined insofar as it encompasses only what affects beings who, like us, are capable of feeling.

¹¹ An exception, apparently, was Kant, who thought "the starry heavens" sublime and compared them with "the moral law within," but did not for all that see our species as comparatively insignificant.

¹² By "proper humility" I mean that sort and degree of humility that is a morally admirable character trait. How precisely to define this is, of course, a controversial matter; but the point for present purposes is just to set aside obsequiousness, false modesty, underestimation of one's abilities, and the like.

¹³ I take this point from some of Philippa Foot's remarks.

This idea that proper humility requires recognition of the importance of nonsentient nature is similar to the thought of those who charge meat eaters with "species-ism." In both cases it is felt that people too narrowly confine their concerns to the sorts of beings that are most like them. But, however intuitively appealing, the idea will surely arouse objections from our nonenvironmentalist critic. "Why," he will ask, "do you suppose that the sort of humility I *should* have requires me to acknowledge the importance of nonsentient nature aside from its utility? You cannot, by your own admission, argue that nonsentient nature *is* important, appealing to religious or intuitionist grounds. And simply to assert, without further argument, that an ideal humility requires us to view nonsentient nature as important for its own sake begs the question at issue. If proper humility is acknowledging the relative importance of things as one should, then to show that I must lack this you must first establish that one *should* acknowledge the importance of nonsentient nature."

Though some may wish to accept this challenge, there are other ways to pursue the connection between humility and response to nonsentient nature. For example, suppose we grant that proper humility requires only acknowledging a due status to sentient beings. We must admit, then, that it is logically possible for a person to be properly humble even though he viewed all nonsentient nature simply as a resource. But this logical possibility may be a psychological rarity. It may be that, given the sort of beings we are, we would never learn humility before persons without developing the general capacity to cherish, and regard important, many things for their own sakes. The major obstacle to humility before persons is self-importance, a tendency to measure the significance of everything by its relation to oneself and those with whom one identifies. The processes by which we overcome self-importance are doubtless many and complex, but it seems unlikely that they are exclusively concerned with how we relate to other people and animals. Learning humility requires learning to feel that something matters besides what will affect oneself and one's circle of associates. What leads a child to care about what happens to a lost hamster or a stray dog he will not see again is likely also to generate concern for a lost toy or a favorite tree where he used to live.¹⁴ Learning to value things for their own sake, and to count what affects them important aside from their utility, is not the same as judging them to have some intuited objective property, but it is necessary to the development of humility and it seems likely to take place in experiences with nonsentient nature as well as with people and animals. If a person views all nonsentient nature merely as a resource, then it seems unlikely that he has developed the capacity needed to overcome self-importance.

¹⁴ The causal history of this concern may well depend upon the object (tree, toy) having given the child pleasure, but this does not mean that the object is then valued only for further pleasure it may bring.

IV

This last argument, unfortunately, has its limits. It presupposes an empirical connection between experiencing nature and overcoming self-importance, and this may be challenged. Even if experiencing nature promotes humility before others, there may be other ways people can develop such humility in a world of concrete, glass, and plastic. If not, perhaps all that is needed is limited experience of nature in one's early, developing years; mature adults, having overcome youthful self-importance, may live well enough in artificial surroundings. More importantly, the argument does not fully capture the spirit of the intuition that an ideal person stands humbly before nature. That idea is not simply that experiencing nature tends to foster proper humility before other people; it is, in part, that natural surroundings encourage and are appropriate to an ideal sense of oneself as part of the natural world. Standing alone in the forest, after months in the city, is not merely good as a means of curbing one's arrogance before others; it reinforces and fittingly expresses one's acceptance of oneself as a natural being.

Previously we considered only one aspect of proper humility, namely, a sense of one's relative importance with respect to other human beings. Another aspect, I think, is a kind of *self-acceptance*. This involves acknowledging, in more than a merely intellectual way, that we are the sort of creatures that we are. Whether one is self-accepting is not so much a matter of how one attributes *importance* comparatively to oneself, other people, animals, plants, and other things as it is a matter of understanding, facing squarely, and responding appropriately to who and what one is, e.g., one's powers and limits, one's affinities with other beings and differences from them, one's unalterable nature and one's freedom to change. Self-acceptance is not merely intellectual awareness, for one can be intellectually aware that one is growing old and will eventually die while nevertheless behaving in a thousand foolish ways that reflect a refusal to acknowledge these facts. On the other hand, self-acceptance is not passive resignation, for refusal to pursue what one truly wants within one's limits is a failure to accept the freedom and power one has. Particular behaviors, like dyeing one's gray hair and dressing like those twenty years younger, do not *necessarily* imply lack of self-acceptance, for there could be reasons for acting in these ways other than the wish to hide from oneself what one really is. One fails to accept oneself when the patterns of behavior and emotion are rooted in a desire to disown and deny features of oneself, to pretend to oneself that they are not there. This is not to say that a self-accepting person makes no value judgments about himself, that he likes all facts about himself, wants equally to develop and display them; he can, and should feel remorse for his past misdeeds and strive to change his current vices. The point is that he does not disown them, pretend that they do not exist or are facts about something other than himself. Such pretense is incompatible with proper humility because it is seeing oneself as better than one is.

Self-acceptance of this sort has long been considered a human excellence, under various names, but what has it to do with preserving nature? There is, I think, the following connection. As human beings we are part of nature, living, growing, declining, and dying by natural laws similar to those governing other living beings; despite our awesomely distinctive human powers, we share many of the needs, limits, and liabilities of animals and plants. These facts are neither good nor bad in themselves, aside from personal preference and varying conventional values. To say this is to utter a truism which few will deny, but to accept these facts, as facts about oneself, is not so easy—or so common. Much of what naturalists deplore about our increasingly artificial world reflects, and encourages, a denial of these facts, an unwillingness to avow them with equanimity.

Like the Victorian lady who refuses to look at her own nude body, some would like to create a world of less transitory stuff, reminding us only of our intellectual and social nature, never calling to mind our affinities with “lower” living creatures. The “denial of death,” to which psychiatrists call attention,¹⁵ reveals an attitude incompatible with the sort of self-acceptance which philosophers, from the ancients to Spinoza and on, have admired as a human excellence. My suggestion is not merely that experiencing nature causally promotes such self-acceptance, but also that those who fully accept themselves as part of the natural world lack the common drive to disassociate themselves from nature by replacing natural environments with artificial ones. A storm in the wilds helps us to appreciate our animal vulnerability, but, equally important, the reluctance to experience it may *reflect* an unwillingness to accept this aspect of ourselves. The person who is too ready to destroy the ancient redwoods may lack humility, not so much in the sense that he exaggerates his importance relative to others, but rather in the sense that he tries to avoid seeing himself as one among many natural creatures.

V

My suggestion so far has been that, though indifference to nonsentient nature is not itself a moral vice, it is likely to reflect either ignorance, a self-importance, or a lack of self-acceptance which we must overcome to have proper humility. A similar idea might be developed connecting attitudes toward nonsentient nature with other human excellences. For example, one might argue that indifference to nature reveals a lack of either an aesthetic sense or some of the natural roots of gratitude.

When we see a hillside that has been gutted by strip miners or the garden replaced by asphalt, our first reaction is probably, “How ugly!” The scenes assault our aesthetic sensibilities. We suspect that no one with a keen sense of

¹⁵ See, for example, Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

beauty could have left such a sight. Admittedly not everything in nature strikes us as beautiful, or even aesthetically interesting, and sometimes a natural scene is replaced with a more impressive architectural masterpiece. But this is not usually the situation in the problem cases which environmentalists are most concerned about. More often beauty is replaced with ugliness.

At this point our critic may well object that, even if he does lack a sense of beauty, this is no moral vice. His cost/benefit calculations take into account the pleasure others may derive from seeing the forests, etc., and so why should he be faulted?

Some might reply that, despite contrary philosophical traditions, aesthetics and morality are not so distinct as commonly supposed. Appreciation of beauty, they may argue, is a human excellence which morally ideal persons should try to develop. But, setting aside this controversial position, there still may be cause for moral concern about those who have no aesthetic response to nature. Even if aesthetic sensibility is not itself a moral virtue, many of the capacities of mind and heart which it presupposes may be ones which are also needed for an appreciation of other people. Consider, for example, curiosity, a mind open to novelty, the ability to look at things from unfamiliar perspectives, empathetic imagination, interest in details, variety, and order, and emotional freedom from the immediate and the practical. All these, and more, seem necessary to aesthetic sensibility, but they are also traits which a person needs to be fully sensitive to people of all sorts. The point is not that a moral person must be able to distinguish beautiful from ugly people; the point is rather that unresponsiveness to what is beautiful, awesome, dainty, dumpy, and otherwise aesthetically interesting in nature probably reflects a lack of the openness of mind and spirit necessary to appreciate the best in human beings.

The anti-environmentalist, however, may refuse to accept the charge that he lacks aesthetic sensibility. If he claims to appreciate seventeenth-century miniature portraits, but to abhor natural wildernesses, he will hardly be convincing. Tastes vary, but aesthetic sense is not *that* selective. He may, instead, insist that he *does* appreciate natural beauty. He spends his vacations, let us suppose, hiking in the Sierras, photographing wildflowers, and so on. He might press his argument as follows: "I enjoy natural beauty as much as anyone, but I fail to see what this has to do with preserving the environment independently of human enjoyment and use. Nonsentient nature is a resource, but one of its best uses is to give us pleasure. I take this into account when I calculate the costs and benefits of preserving a park, planting a garden, and so on. But the problem you raised explicitly set aside the desire to preserve nature as a means to enjoyment. I say, let us enjoy nature fully while we can, but if all sentient beings were to die tomorrow, we might as well blow up all plant life as well. A redwood grove that no one can use or enjoy is utterly worthless."

The attitude expressed here, I suspect, is not a common one, but it represents a philosophical challenge. The beginnings of a reply may be found in the

following. When a person takes joy in something, it is a common (and perhaps natural) response to come to cherish it. To cherish something is not simply to be happy with it at the moment, but to care for it for its own sake. This is not to say that one necessarily sees it as having feelings and so wants it to feel good; nor does it imply that one judges the thing to have Moore's intrinsic value. One simply wants the thing to survive and (when appropriate) to thrive, and not simply for its utility. We see this attitude repeatedly regarding mementos. They are not simply valued as a means to remind us of happy occasions; they come to be valued for their own sake. Thus, if someone really took joy in the natural environment, but was prepared to blow it up as soon as sentient life ended, he would lack this common human tendency to cherish what enriches our lives. While this response is not itself a moral virtue, it may be a natural basis of the virtue we call "gratitude." People who have no tendency to cherish things that give them pleasure may be poorly disposed to respond gratefully to persons who are good to them. Again the connection is not one of logical necessity, but it may nevertheless be important. A nonreligious person unable to "thank" anyone for the beauties of nature may nevertheless feel "grateful" in a sense; and I suspect that the person who feels no such "gratitude" toward nature is unlikely to show proper gratitude toward people.

Suppose these conjectures prove to be true. One may wonder what is the point of considering them. Is it to disparage all those who view nature merely as a resource? To do so, it seems, would be unfair, for, even if this attitude typically stems from deficiencies which affect one's attitudes toward sentient beings, there may be exceptions and we have not shown that their view of nonsentient nature is itself blameworthy. But when we set aside questions of blame and inquire what sorts of human traits we want to encourage, our reflections become relevant in a more positive way. The point is not to insinuate that all anti-environmentalists are defective, but to see that those who value such traits as humility, gratitude, and sensitivity to others have reason to promote the love of nature.

[21]

Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism

Bryan G. Norton*

The assumption that environmental ethics must be nonanthropocentric in order to be adequate is mistaken. There are two forms of anthropocentrism, weak and strong, and weak anthropocentrism is adequate to support an environmental ethic. Environmental ethics is, however, distinctive vis-à-vis standard British and American ethical systems because, in order to be adequate, it must be nonindividualistic. Environmental ethics involves decisions on two levels, one kind of which differs from usual decisions affecting individual fairness while the other does not. The latter, called allocational decisions, are not reducible to the former and govern the use of resources across extended time. Weak anthropocentrism provides a basis for criticizing individual, consumptive needs and can provide the basis for adjudicating between these levels, thereby providing an adequate basis for environmental ethics without the questionable ontological commitments made by nonanthropocentrists in attributing intrinsic value to nature.

I. INTRODUCTION

In two essays already published in this journal, I have argued that an environmental ethic cannot be derived, first, from rights or interests of nonhumans and, second, from rights or interests of future generations of humans.¹ Those negative conclusions pave the way for a more positive discussion of the nature and shape of environmental ethics and, in the present paper, I undertake that task. In particular, I address the question of whether there must be a distinctively environmental ethic.

Discussions of this question in the literature have equated a negative answer with the belief that the standard categories of rights, interests, and duties of

*Division of Humanities, New College of the University of South Florida, Sarasota, FL 33580. Norton spent 1981–83 at the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy at the University of Maryland where he was the principal investigator of a project on the preservation of species, funded by the National Science Foundation's Ethics and Values in Science and Technology Program. That project will yield two books, *The Preservation of Species* (a multi-disciplinary anthology) and *The Spice of Life* (a philosophical examination of various rationales for preserving nonhuman species). Work on the present paper was completed under a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend on Ecological Theory and Ethics and under the National Science Foundation grant mentioned above. Valuable comments and criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper were received from J. Baird Callicott, Robert Fullinwider, Holmes Rolston, III, Mark Sagoff, and Richard A. Watson.

¹ Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Nonhuman Rights," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 17–36, and "Environmental Ethics and the Rights of Future Generations," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 319–37.

individual human beings are adequate to furnish ethical guidance in environmental decision making. A positive answer is equated with the suggestion that nature has, in some sense, intrinsic value. In other words, the question of whether environmental ethics is distinctive is taken as equivalent to the question of whether an environmental ethic must reject anthropocentrism, the view that only humans are loci of fundamental value.² Environmental ethics is seen as distinctive vis-à-vis standard ethics if and only if environmental ethics can be founded upon principles which assert or presuppose that nonhuman natural entities have value independent of human value.

I argue that this equivalence is mistaken by showing that the anthropocentrism/nonanthropocentrism debate is far less important than is usually assumed. Once an ambiguity is noted in its central terms, it becomes clear that nonanthropocentrism is not the only adequate basis for a truly environmental ethic.³ I then argue that another dichotomy, that of individualism versus nonindividualism, should be seen as crucial to the distinctiveness of environmental ethics and that a successful environmental ethic cannot be individualistic in the way that standard contemporary ethical systems are. Finally, I examine the consequences of these conclusions for the nature and shape of an environmental ethic.

Before beginning these arguments, I need to clarify how I propose to test an adequate environmental ethic. I begin by assuming that all environmentally sensitive individuals believe that there is a set of human behaviors which do or would damage the environment. Further, I assume that there is considerable agreement among such individuals about what behaviors are included in that set. Most would decry, for example, careless storage of toxic wastes, grossly overpopulating the world with humans, wanton destruction of other species, air and water pollution, and so forth. There are other behaviors which would be more controversial, but I take the initial task of constructing an adequate environmental ethic to be the statement of some set of principles from which rules can be derived proscribing the behaviors included in the set which virtually all environmentally sensitive individuals agree are environmentally destructive. The further task of refining an environmental ethic then involves moving back and forth between the basic principles and the more or less controversial behaviors, adjusting principles and/or rejecting intuitions until the best possible fit between principles and sets of proscribed behaviors is

² See, for example, Richard Routley, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?" *Proceedings of the XV World Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (1973), pp. 205-10; Holmes Rolston, III, "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" *Ethics* 85 (1975): 93-109; Tom Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 19-34; and Evelyn B. Pluhar, "The Justification of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 319-37.

³ See Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," who distinguishes "an ethic of the environment" from "an ethic for the use of the environment" (p. 20), where the former, but not the latter, recognizes the intrinsic (inherent) value of nonhuman elements of nature. If the arguments of this paper are persuasive, Regan's distinction will lose interest.

obtained for the whole environmental community. In the present paper I address the prior question of basic principles. I am here only seeking to clarify which principles do (and which do not) support the large set of relatively uncontroversial cases of behaviors damaging to the environment. An ethic will be adequate, on this approach, if its principles are sufficient to entail rules proscribing the behaviors involved in the noncontroversial set. My arguments, then, are not directed at determining which principles are *true*, but which are *adequate* to uphold certain shared intuitions. Questions concerning the truth of such principles must be left for another occasion.

II. ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND NONANTHROPOCENTRISM

I suggest that the distinction between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism has been given more importance in discussions of the foundations of environmental ethics than it warrants because a crucial ambiguity in the term *anthropocentrism* has gone unnoticed.⁴ Writers on both sides of the controversy apply this term to positions which treat humans as the only loci of intrinsic value.⁵ Anthropocentrists are therefore taken to believe that every instance of value originates in a contribution to human values and that all elements of nature can, at most, have value instrumental to the satisfaction of human interests.⁶ Note that anthropocentrism is defined by reference to the position taken on *loci* of value. Some nonanthropocentrists say that human beings are the *source* of all values, but that they can designate nonhuman objects as loci of fundamental value.⁷

It has also become common to explain and test views on this point by reference to "last man examples" which are formulated as follows.⁸ Assume that a human being, *S*, is the last living member of *Homo sapiens* and that

⁴ My thoughts on this subject have been deeply affected by discussions of the work of Donald Regan and J. Baird Callicott. See, Donald Regan, "Duties of Preservation," and J. Baird Callicott, "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species," in *The Preservation of Species*, edited by Bryan G. Norton (in preparation).

⁵ I borrow this phrase from Donald Scherer, "Anthropocentrism, Atomism, and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 115-23.

⁶ I take anthropocentrism to be interchangeable with homocentrism. See R. and V. Routley, "Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism," in *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century*, edited by K.E. Goodpaster and K.M. Sayre (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 56-7. Routley and Routley show that "human chauvinism" (anthropocentrism, homocentrism) are equivalent to the thesis of man's "dominion," which they describe as "the view that the earth and all its nonhuman contents exist or are available for man's benefit and to serve his interests."

⁷ See J. Baird Callicott, "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species," in Norton, *The Preservation of Species* (in preparation), and Pluhar, "The Justification of an Environmental Ethic."

⁸ See, for example, Richard Routley, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" p. 207; Routley and Routley, "Human Chauvinism and Environmental Ethics," in *Environmental Philosophy*, edited by D.S. Mannison, M.A. McRobbie and R. Routley (Canberra: Australian National University, Department of Philosophy, 1980), p. 121; and Donald Regan, "Duties of Preservation," in Norton, *The Preservation of Species*.

S faces imminent death. Would *S* do wrong to wantonly destroy some object *X*? A positive answer to this question with regard to any nonhuman *X* is taken to entail nonanthropocentrism. If the variable *X* refers to some natural object, a species, an ecosystem, a geological formation, etc., then it is thought that positions on such questions determine whether a person is an anthropocentrist or not, because the action in question cannot conceivably harm any human individual. If it is wrong to destroy *X*, the wrongness must derive from harm to *X* or to some other natural object. But one can harm something only if it is a good in its own right in the sense of being a locus of fundamental value.

Or so the story goes. I am unconvinced because not nearly enough has been said about what counts as a human interest. In order to explore this difficult area, I introduce two useful definitions. A *felt preference* is any desire or need of a human individual that can at least temporarily be sated by some specifiable experience of that individual. A *considered preference* is any desire or need that a human individual would express after careful deliberation, including a judgment that the desire or need is consistent with a rationally adopted world view—a world view which includes fully supported scientific theories and a metaphysical framework interpreting those theories, as well as a set of rationally supported aesthetic and moral ideals.

When interests are assumed to be constructed merely from felt preferences, they are thereby insulated from any criticism or objection. Economic approaches to decision making often adopt this approach because it eschews “value judgments”—decision makers need only ask people what they want, perhaps correct these preferences for intensity, compute the preferences satisfied by the various possible courses of action, and let the resulting ordinal ranking imply a decision.

A considered preference, on the other hand, is an idealization in the sense that it can only be adopted after a person has rationally accepted an entire world view and, further, has succeeded in altering his felt preferences so that they are consonant with that world view. Since this is a process no one has ever completed, references to considered preferences are hypothetical—they refer to preferences the individual would have if certain contrary-to-fact conditions were fulfilled. Nonetheless, references to considered preferences remain useful because it is possible to distinguish felt preferences from considered preferences when there are convincing arguments that felt preferences are not consistent with some element of a world view that appears worthy of rational support.

It is now possible to define two forms of anthropocentrism. A value theory is *strongly anthropocentric* if all value countenanced by it is explained by reference to satisfactions of felt preferences of human individuals. A value theory is *weakly anthropocentric* if all value countenanced by it is explained by reference to satisfaction of some felt preference of a human individual or by reference to its bearing upon the ideals which exist as elements in a world view essential to determinations of considered preferences.

Strong anthropocentrism, as here defined, takes unquestioned felt preferences of human individuals as determining value. Consequently, if humans have a strongly consumptive value system, then their "interests" (which are taken merely to be their felt preferences) dictate that nature will be used in an exploitative manner. Since there is no check upon the felt preferences of individuals in the value system of strong anthropocentrism, there exists no means to criticize the behavior of individuals who use nature merely as a storehouse of raw materials to be extracted and used for products serving human preferences.

Weak anthropocentrism, on the other hand, recognizes that felt preferences can be either rational or not (in the sense that they can be judged not consonant with a rational world view). Hence, weak anthropocentrism provides a basis for criticism of value systems which are purely exploitative of nature. In this way, weak anthropocentrism makes available two ethical resources of crucial importance to environmentalists. First, to the extent that environmental ethicists can make a case for a world view that emphasizes the close relationship between the human species and other living species, they can also make a case for ideals of human behavior extolling harmony with nature. These ideals are then available as a basis for criticizing preferences that merely exploit nature.

Second, weak anthropocentrism as here defined also places value on human experiences that provide the basis for value formation. Because weak anthropocentrism places value not only on felt preferences, but also on the process of value formation embodied in the criticism and replacement of felt preferences with more rational ones, it makes possible appeals to the value of experiences of natural objects and undisturbed places in human value formation. To the extent that environmentalists can show that values are formed and informed by contact with nature, nature takes on value as a teacher of human values. Nature need no longer be seen as a mere satisfier of fixed and often consumptive values—it also becomes an important source of inspiration in value formation.⁹

In the final section of this paper I develop these two sources of value in nature more fully. Even there my goal is not to defend these two bases for environmental protection as embodying true claims about the value of nature—that, as I said at the outset is a larger and later task. My point is only that, within the limits set by weak anthropocentrism as here defined, there exists a framework for developing powerful reasons for protecting nature. Further, these reasons do not resemble the extractive and exploitative reasons normally associated with strong anthropocentrism.

⁹ For fuller discussions of this point, see Mark Sagoff, "On Preserving the Natural Environment," *Yale Law Journal* 84 (1974): 205–67; Holmes Rolston, III, "Can and Ought We to Follow Nature?" *Environmental Ethics* 1 (1979): 7–21; and Bryan G. Norton, *The Spice of Life* (in preparation)

And they do not differ from strongly anthropocentric reasons in merely theoretical ways. Weakly anthropocentric reasoning can affect behavior as can be seen by applying it to last man situations. Suppose that human beings choose, for rational or religious reasons, to live according to an ideal of maximum harmony with nature. Suppose also that this ideal is taken seriously and that anyone who impairs that harmony (by destroying another species, by polluting air and water, etc.) would be judged harshly. But such an ideal need not attribute intrinsic value to natural objects, nor need the prohibitions implied by it be justified with nonanthropocentric reasoning attributing intrinsic value to nonhuman natural objects. Rather, they can be justified as being implied by the ideal of harmony with nature. This ideal, in turn, can be justified either on religious grounds referring to human spiritual development or as being a fitting part of a rationally defensible world view.

Indeed, there exist examples of well developed world views that exhibit these characteristics. The Hindus and Jains, in proscribing the killing of insects, etc., show concern for their own spiritual development rather than for the actual lives of those insects. Likewise, Henry David Thoreau is careful not to attribute independent, intrinsic value to nature. Rather he believes that nature expresses a deeper spiritual reality and that humans can learn spiritual values from it.¹⁰ Nor should it be inferred that only spiritually oriented positions can uphold weakly anthropocentric reasons. In a post-Darwinian world, one could give rational and scientific support for a world view that includes ideals of living in harmony with nature, but which involve no attributions of intrinsic value to nature.

Views such as those just described are weakly anthropocentric because they refer only to human values, but they are not strongly so because human behavior is limited by concerns other than those derivable from prohibitions against interfering with the satisfaction of human felt preferences. And practically speaking, the difference in behavior between strong anthropocentrists and weak anthropocentrists of the sort just described and exemplified is very great. In particular, the reaction of these weak anthropocentrists to last man situations is undoubtedly more similar to that of nonanthropocentrists than to that of strong anthropocentrists. Ideals such as that of living in harmony with nature imply rules proscribing the wanton destruction of other species or ecosystems even if the human species faces imminent extinction.

But it might be objected that positions such as those here sketched only appear to avoid attributions of intrinsic value to nature and natural objects. For example, Tom Regan has argued that a position similar to them makes covert appeal to the intrinsic value of nonhuman objects and hence fails to

¹⁰ See Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958). Note page 64, for example, where Thoreau writes: "One value of even the smallest well is, that when you look into it you see that earth is not continent but insular. This is as important as that it keeps butter cool."

embody a purely anthropocentric argument for the preservation of nature. He writes:

If we are told that treating the environment in certain ways offends against an ideal of human conduct, we are not being given a position that is an alternative to, or inconsistent with, the view that nonconscious objects have a value of their own. The fatal objection which the offense against an ideal argument encounters, is that, rather than offering an alternative to the view that some nonconscious objects have inherent value, it presupposes that they do.¹¹

Prior to this conclusion, Regan states three propositions which are intended to support it:

The fitting way to act in regard to *X* clearly involves a commitment to regarding *X* as having value. . . . An ideal which enjoins us not to act toward *X* in a certain way but which denies that *X* has any value is either unintelligible or pointless. Ideals, in short, involve the recognition of the value of *that toward which one acts*.¹²

Regan's three propositions, however, are either false or they fail to support his conclusion. If the value they refer to is inclusive of intrinsic and instrumental value, the propositions are true but do not support the conclusion that all ideals of human conduct imply intrinsic value of the object protected by the ideal. Ideals regarding the treatment of my neighbor's horse (viewed as a piece of private property) imply only that the horse has instrumental, not intrinsic, value. If, on the other hand, Regan intends the references to value in the three propositions to refer to *intrinsic* value exclusively, then all three propositions are clearly false. I can accept that there is a fitting way to act in regard to my neighbor's horse, without thereby accepting any commitment to accord intrinsic value to it. Nor am I thereby committed to anything either unintelligible or pointless. I need not recognize the intrinsic value of the horse; I can, alternatively, recognize the intrinsic value of my neighbor and her preference that the horse not be harmed.

The example of the horse provides a counterexample to Regan's argument, thereby showing that the argument is unsound. It does so, admittedly, by appealing to the instrumental value of the horse for human preference satisfaction. It does not, therefore, directly address the question of whether there are ideals of environmental protection supportable on weakly anthropocentric grounds, but which imply no intrinsic value for the protected objects. The examples mentioned earlier, however, fulfill this function. If the Hindu, the Jainist, or the follower of Thoreau appeals to ideals designed to improve hu-

¹¹ Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," pp. 25-26. It involves no distortion, I think, to equate Regan's use of *inherent* with mine of *intrinsic*.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

mans spiritually, then they can justify those ideals without attributing intrinsic value to the objects protected. Nor are the spiritual aspects of these examples essential. If ideals of human behavior are justified as fitting parts of a world view which can be rationally supported from a human perspective, then these ideals, too, escape Regan's argument—they might support protection of nature as a fitting thing for humans to strive toward, without attributing intrinsic value to nature.

Nor need weak anthropocentrism collapse into strong anthropocentrism. It would do so if the dichotomy between preferences and ideals were indefensible. If all values can, ultimately, be interpreted as satisfactions of preferences, then ideals are simply human preferences. The controversy here is reminiscent of that discussed by early utilitarians. John Stuart Mill, for example, argued that because higher pleasures ultimately can be seen to provide greater satisfactions, there is thus only a single scale of values—preference satisfaction.¹³ It is true that weak anthropocentrists must deny that preference satisfaction is the only measure of human value. They must take human ideals seriously enough so that they can be set against preference satisfactions as a limit upon them. It is therefore no surprise that weak anthropocentrists reject the reductionistic position popular among utilitarians. Indeed, it is precisely the rejection of that reductionism that allows them to steer their way between strong anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. The rejection of this reduction is, of course, a commitment that weak anthropocentrists share with nonanthropocentrists. Both believe there are values distinct from human preference satisfaction, rejecting the reduction of ideals to preferences. They differ not on this point, but on whether the justification of those ideals must appeal to the intrinsic value of nonhuman objects.

Weak anthropocentrism is, therefore, an attractive position for environmentalists. It requires no radical, difficult-to-justify claims about the intrinsic value of nonhuman objects and, at the same time, it provides a framework for stating obligations that goes beyond concern for satisfying human preferences. It, rather, allows the development of arguments to the effect that current, largely consumptive attitudes toward nature are indefensible, because they do not fit into a world view that is rationally defensible in terms not implying intrinsic value for nonhumans. It can also emphasize the value of nature in forming, rather than in satisfying human preferences, as preferences can be modified in the process of striving toward a consistent and rationally defensible world view.

III. INDIVIDUALISM AND NONINDIVIDUALISM

The distinctions and arguments presented above convince me that, while the development of a nonanthropocentric axiology committed to intrinsic value for nonhuman natural entities remains an interesting philosophical enterprise,

¹³ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chap. 2.

the dichotomy on which it is based has less importance for the nature of environmental ethics than is usually thought. In particular, I see no reason to think that, if environmental ethics is distinctive, its distinctiveness derives from the necessity of appeals to the intrinsic value of nonhuman natural objects. Once two forms of anthropocentrism are distinguished, it appears that from one, weak anthropocentrism, an adequate environmental ethic can be derived. If that is true, authors who equate the question of the distinctiveness of an adequate environmental ethic with the claim that nature or natural objects have intrinsic value are mistaken.

There is, nevertheless, reason to believe that an adequate environmental ethic is distinctive. In this section, I argue that no successful environmental ethic can be derived from an individualistic basis, whether the individuals in question are human or nonhuman. Since most contemporary ethical systems are essentially individualistic, an adequate environmental ethic is distinctive, not by being necessarily nonanthropocentric as many environmental ethicists have argued or assumed, but, rather, by being nonindividualistic.

Standard contemporary ethical theories, at least in the United States and Western Europe are essentially individualistic. By this I mean that the behavioral prohibitions embodied in them derive from the principle that actions ought not to harm other individuals unjustifiably. Utilitarians derive ethical rules from the general principle that all actions should promote the greatest possible happiness for the greatest possible number of individuals. This means that actions (or rules) are judged to be legitimate or not according to whether more good (and less harm) for individuals will result from the action than from any alternative. On this view, the satisfaction of each individual interest is afforded an initial *prima facie* value. Some such interests are not to be satisfied because the information available indicates that if they are, some greater interest or sets of interests of some individuals cannot be satisfied concurrently with them. The utilitarian principle, supplemented by empirical predictions about the consequences of actions for individuals, filters happiness-maximizing actions from others that do not maximize happiness. For present purposes, the important point is that the satisfaction of individual interests are the basic unit of value for utilitarians, and in this sense, utilitarianism (either of the act or rule variety) is essentially individualistic.¹⁴

Contemporary deontologists derive ethical prohibitions from individual rights and obligations to protect those rights.¹⁵ Individuals make claims, and

¹⁴ I do not intend to imply here that utilitarians are limited to treating human interests as felt preferences. Utilitarians adopt varied interpretations of interests in relation to happiness. My point is only that human individual interests, however determined, are the basis of their moral calculus.

¹⁵ I qualify the position here discussed as "contemporary" deontology because there is a strain of thought in Kant which emphasizes that the imperatives are abstract principles. Modern neo-Kantians such as Rawls, however, emphasize the more individualistic strains in Kant, placing him more in the contractarian tradition. Contractarian deontologists—those that fit clearly into the liberal tradition—are my concern here. (I am indebted to Douglas Berggren for clarifying this point.)

when these claims conflict with claims made by other individuals, they are judged to be legitimate or illegitimate according to a set of ethical rules designed to make such decisions. Although these rules, in essence, are the embodiment of a system of justice and fairness, the rules adjudicate between claims of individuals, and consequently modern deontology is essentially individualistic.¹⁶ Therefore, both utilitarianism and modern deontology are essentially individualistic in the sense that the basic units of ethical concern are interests or claims of individuals.

It is characteristic of the rules of environmental ethics that they must prohibit current behaviors that have effects upon the long-range future as well as the present. For example, storage of radioactive wastes with a half-life of thousands of years in containers that will deteriorate in a few centuries must be prohibited by an adequate environmental ethic, even if such actions, on the whole, provide the most benefits and no harms to currently living individuals. Likewise, human demographic growth, if subsequent generations continue that policy, will create severe overpopulation, a behavior negatively affecting the future of the environment, and hence human reproductive behavior must be governed by an adequate environmental ethic. An adequate environmental ethic must therefore prohibit current activities generally agreed to have negative effects on the environment of the future.

I have argued at length elsewhere that a paradox, due to Derek Parfit, effectively precludes systems of ethics which are individualistic in the sense defined above from governing current decisions by reference to their effects on future individuals.¹⁷ To summarize that argument briefly, it exploits the insight that no system of ethics built exclusively upon adjudications of interests of present and future individuals can govern current decisions and their effects on future individuals because current environmental decisions determine what individuals will exist in the future. Parfit's argument notes that current decisions regarding consumption determine how many individuals and which individuals will be born in the future. On a policy of fast demographic growth and high consumption, different individuals will exist a century from now than would exist if the current generation adopts a policy of low growth and moderate consumption. Assume, as most environmentalists do, that a policy of high growth and immoderate consumption will leave the future with a lower quality of life than more moderate growth policies would. The individuals who

¹⁶ For a clear explanation of how rights function to adjudicate individual claims, see Joel Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 4 (1970): 243-57. While not all writers agree that rights originate in claims, the disputes are immaterial here. For example, McCloskey's linkage of rights to "entitlements" is not inconsistent with my point. H. J. McCloskey, "Rights," *Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1965): 115-27.

¹⁷ See, "Energy and the Further Future," in *Energy and the Future*, edited by Douglas MacLean and Peter G. Brown (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983). I apply Parfit's "paradox" to environmental ethics in "Environmental Ethics and the Rights of Future Generations," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 321. See that essay for a more detailed discussion.

are, in fact, born as a result of the immoderate growth policies cannot complain that they would have been better off had the policies been different—for they would not even have existed had moderate policies been adopted. That is, Parfit's paradox shows that current policy cannot be governed by reference to harms to the interests of future individuals, because those policies determine who those individuals will be and what interests they will have. Attempts to govern behaviors affecting the distant future cannot, therefore, be governed by appeal to individual interests of future persons, since the very existence of such individuals hangs in the balance until all relevant decisions are made.

Since the ethical intuitions shared by all environmentally sensitive individuals include prohibitions against behaviors which may have negative effects only in the long-term future (and not in the present), the rules of environmental ethics cannot be derived from the usual, individualistic systems of ethics currently in vogue. Note, also, that my argument concerning individualism makes no assumption that only human individuals make claims or have interests and rights. Future nonhuman individuals are, likewise, affected by human policies regarding consumption and reproduction. Consequently, expansion of the loss of individual rights holders, or preference havens to include nonhumans in no way affects the argument. No ethical system which is essentially individualistic, regardless of how broadly the reference category of individuals is construed, can offer ethical guidance concerning current environmental policy in all cases.

IV. A PROPOSAL FOR AN ADEQUATE ANTHROPOCENTRIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

The arguments of the last section are surprisingly simple and general, but if they are sound, they explain the fairly general intuition that environmental ethics must be distinctive in some sense, although not in the sense usually assumed. So far my conclusions have all been negative—I have argued that an adequate environmental ethic *need not* be nonanthropocentric and that an adequate environmental ethic *must not* be limited to considerations of individual interests. From these conclusions a new direction for environmental ethics emerges which is weakly anthropocentric—it finds all value in human loci—and which is also nonindividualistic in the sense that value is not restricted to satisfactions of felt preferences of human individuals. In other words, the arguments of the first two sections of the paper (1) positively define a space by establishing the possibility of a weakly, but not strongly, anthropocentric environmental ethic and (2) negatively constrain that ethic by eliminating the possibility that it be purely individualistic.

My purpose now is not to demonstrate that the ethical principles I have set out are definitely correct or that they are the only adequate principles available. My goal, rather, is to present a valid alternative for environmental ethics that

is adequate in a manner that no purely individualistic, strongly anthropocentric ethic can be, while avoiding difficult-to-defend references to the intrinsic value of nonhuman natural objects.

I begin my explication with an analogy. Suppose an extremely wealthy individual, through a will, sets up a very large trust fund "to be managed for the economic well-being of my descendants." Over the years, descendants will be born and die, and the class of beneficiaries will change through time. Suppose, also, that the family drifts apart emotionally and becomes highly contentious. I suggest that two sorts of controversies, each with its own distinctive logic, could arise concerning the fund. First, there may be issues about the *fair distribution* of proceeds of the trust. Some descendants might claim that other descendants are not entitled to full shares, because they are, or are descended from, an illegitimate offspring of a member of the family. Or it might be disputed whether adopted children of descendants are included in the terms of the will.

Second, there may well be disputes about the *management* of the trust. Here, there may be questions concerning what sorts of investments are "good investments." Should all investments be safe ones, thereby insuring a continued, although smaller income? Might the principle of the trust be invaded in years where the income from investments is unusually low? Might one generation simply spend the principle, dividing it fairly among themselves, showing no concern for future descendants?

To apply this analogy in obvious ways, ethical questions about the environment can be divided into ones concerning distributional fairness within generations and others concerning longer-term, cross-generational issues. If the arguments in the third section are correct, then the latter are not reducible to the former; nor do they have the same logic. It can be assumed that many environmental concerns, as well as nonenvironmental ones, can be resolved as issues of distributional fairness. If a property owner pollutes a stream running through his property, this action raises a question of fairness between him and his downstream neighbors.¹⁸ These moral issues are, presumably, as amenable to resolution using the categories and rules of standard, individualistic ethics as are nonenvironmental ones.

But there are also many questions in environmental ethics that are analogous to questions of management of a trust across time. Soil, water, forests, coal, oil, etc. are analogous to the principle of the trust. If they are used up, destroyed, or degraded, they no longer provide benefits. The income from the trust provides an analogy for renewable resources. As long as the productive resource (analogous to the principle of the trust) is intact, one can expect a steady flow of benefits.

¹⁸ This is not to suggest, of course, that such action could not also have more long-term effects raising issues of the second sort as well.

One feature that makes environmental ethics distinctive is concern for protection of the resource base through indefinite time. Parfit's paradox shows that these concerns cannot be accounted for by reference to concerns for individuals and to the obligation not to harm other individuals unjustifiably. The obligations are analogous to those accepted by an individual who is appointed executor of the trust fund. Although decisions made by the executor affect individuals and their well-being, the obligation is to the integrity of the trust, not to those individuals. While one might be tempted to say that the obligation of the executor is to future individuals who will be born, but who are at this time unknown, this conceptualization also involves a failure to perceive the profundity of Parfit's paradox. Suppose all of the members of a given generation of the family in question sign an agreement not to have offspring and thereby convince the executor to disburse the principle of the trust equally among current beneficiaries. Perhaps this is consistent with the terms of the trust, but it shows that the current choices of the executor cannot be guided by abstract conceptions of "future individuals." When current decisions about management are interlocked with not-yet-decided questions affecting the future existence of individuals, it is impossible to refer to those individuals as the basis of guidance in making current management decisions.

Suppose a generation of the entire human species freely decided to sterilize itself, thereby freeing itself to consume without fear of harming future individuals. Would they do wrong? Yes.¹⁹ The perpetuation of the human species is a good thing because a universe containing human consciousness is preferable to one without it.²⁰ This value claim implies that current generations must show concern for future generations. They must take steps to avoid the extinction of the species and they must provide a reasonably stable resource base so that future generations will not suffer great deprivation. These are the bases of rules of management analogous to the rules for administering a trust fund. They do not have individuals or individual interests as their reference point, but they do govern behavior that will affect future individuals.

It is now possible to outline a weakly anthropocentric, nonindividualistic environmental ethic. Such an ethic has two levels. The distributional level has

¹⁹ This answer implies a disanalogy with the trust fund situation, provided one accepts the judgment that no wrong would be committed if a generation of the family chose not to reproduce. I think there is a disanalogy here, as different reproductive obligations would arise if the future of the human species were at stake. Suppose one answers this question negatively regarding the future of human kind and then considers the possibility that the last human individual might wantonly destroy other species, natural places, etc. I would still reject such wanton acts as inconsistent with good human behavior, relying upon weakly anthropocentric arguments as described above.

²⁰ I willingly accept the implication of this value claim that, in a situation of severely contracting human population, some or all individuals would have an obligation to reproduce, but I will not defend this central claim here. Although I believe it can be defended, I am more interested in integrating it into a coherent ethical system than in defending it.

as its principle that one ought not to harm other human individuals unjustifiably. This principle rests upon the assumption that felt preferences, desires that occur within individual human consciousness, have equal *prima facie* value. Rules for the fair treatment of individuals are derived from the principle of no harm and prescribe fair treatment of individuals, whether regarding benefits derived from the environment or from other sources. Since there is nothing distinctive about the environmental prescriptions and proscriptions that occur on this level—they do not differ in nature from other issues of individual fairness—I do not discuss them further.

Decisions on the second level of environmental ethics, which I call the level of “allocation,” cannot, however, be based upon individual considerations. The central value placed on human consciousness is not a result of aggregating the value of individual consciousnesses, because the value of ongoing consciousness cannot be derived from the value of individual consciousnesses—they cannot be identified or counted prior to the making of decisions on resource allocation.²¹ Therefore, obligations on this level are owed to no individual and can be called “generalized obligations.” They are obligations of the current generation to maintain a stable flow of resources into the indefinite future and, consequently, they are stated *vis-à-vis* resources necessary for ongoing human life, not *vis-à-vis* individual requirements. Resources represent the means for supporting life looked at from a nonindividual perspective. The individual perspective determines needs and wants and then seeks means to fulfill them. Concern for the continued flow of resources insures that sources of goods and services such as ecosystems, soil, forests, etc. remain “healthy” and are not deteriorating. In this way, options are held open and reasonable needs of individuals for whatever goods and services can be fulfilled with reasonable labor, technology, and ingenuity. The emphasis of this concern, however, is not individualistic since it is not focused on the fulfillment of specifiable needs, but rather on the integrity and health of ongoing ecosystems as holistic entities.

While the long-term nature of the concern implies that the stability of the resource base must be protected, this stability is not the same thing as ecological stability. It is an open (and controversial) question as to what the stability of ecosystems means. Further, there are controversies concerning the extent to which there are scientifically supportable generalizations about what is necessary to protect ecological stability. For example, it is highly controversial whether diversity, in general, promotes and/or is necessary for ecological stability.²² These controversies are too complex to enter into here, but they are relevant. To the extent that scientists know what is necessary to protect the

²¹ On a closely related point, see Brian Barry, “Circumstances of Justice and Future Generations,” in Sikora and Barry, eds. *Obligations to Future Generations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978).

²² See Norton, *The Spice of Life*.

resource base, there is an obligation to act upon it. Even if there are few sweeping generalizations such as those concerning diversity and stability, there are a wide variety of less general rules that are well supported and are being systematically ignored in environmental policy. Ecologists and resource managers know that clear-cutting tropical forests on steep slopes causes disastrous erosion, that intensely tilling monocultures causes loss of topsoil, and that overexploitation of fisheries can cause new and far less productive species compositions. Further, there is an obligation, where knowledge is lacking, to seek that knowledge in order to avoid unintentional destruction.

An ethic of resource allocation should apply to nonrenewable resources as well as to renewable ones and should also imply a population policy. The general injunction to maintain the stability of the resource base across generations follows from the value of human consciousness. It implies that, with respect to renewable, or interest-bearing resources, present generations should not harvest more than the maximum sustainable yield of the resource. But what does stability imply with respect to nonrenewable resources? Although at first glance it would seem to suggest that a stable supply can only be sustained if no utilization takes place, this reasoning is based on a confusion—it is not the case that there is an obligation to have a certain, fixed amount of goods in supply, but rather there is an obligation to maintain a stable level of goods *available for use*. The ethical principle, in other words, is directed at maintaining the possibility of human consciousness which requires resource use. What is required, then, is a constant supply of resources available for utilization by succeeding generations. Once the problem is framed in this manner, human technology and the phenomenon of substitutability of products become relevant. Present humans may use up nonrenewable resources, provided they take steps to provide suitable substitutes. If, for example, the present generation uses up a major portion of the accumulated fossil fuels available, they will have done nothing wrong if they leave the next generation with a technology capable of deriving energy from renewable sources such as the sun, wind, or ocean currents.²³ There are significant trade-offs available back and forth between renewable and nonrenewable resources.

Note also that this system implies a population principle—the level of population in any given generation should be determined by the requirements for the stability of the resource flow. Such a determination would be based on an assessment of (a) how many people are consistent with the maximal sustainable yield of renewable resources and (b) how many people are consistent with a level of use for nonrenewable resources which does not outstrip the ability of the existing technology to produce suitable substitutes. A population principle follows, in turn, from this stability principle. One need not identify future

²³ I am, for the sake of the example, ignoring other long-term effects of the use of fossil fuels. Problems due to the greenhouse effect would, of course, also have to be solved.

individuals or worry about utilities of possible individuals on this approach. The obligation is to maintain maximum sustainable yield consistent with the stability of the resource flow. The population principle sets a population policy for a generation as a whole based on the carrying capacity of the environment. Questions about who, in a given generation, should have children and how many each individual can have, may be treated as questions of interpersonal equity among the existing individuals of any given generation.

The ethical obligations constituting an ethic of allocation are quite simple as they derive from a single value—that of ongoing human consciousness. In general form, however, they do not state specifically what to do; they only require actions necessary to retain a stable resource base through indefinite time. Scientific knowledge can, in principle, nevertheless, indicate specific actions necessary in order to fulfill that obligation. Scientific evidence is sufficient to imply that many currently widespread practices violate those obligations either directly or cumulatively and are, in terms of this system, immoral. There are also areas where scientific knowledge is insufficient to decide whether and how certain practices are destructive. Here, the obligation is to be cautious and to proceed to obtain the information necessary.

While science plays a crucial role in this system, the system is not naturalistic. It does not derive moral obligations from purely scientific statements. Central to all obligations of present individuals to the future is an obligation to perpetuate the value of human consciousness. Science elucidates and makes concrete the specific obligations flowing from that central obligation but does not support it.

V. RELATING THE TWO LEVELS

The ethic proposed has two levels—one has the *prima facie* equality of felt preferences of individual humans as its central value principle; the other has the value of ongoing human life and consciousness as its central value principle. Rules and behaviors justified on these two levels can, of course, conflict. If felt preferences are overly consumptive, then the future of human life may be threatened. Conversely, one can imagine situations where concern for the future of the human species might lead to draconian measures threatening the life or livelihood of current individuals by limiting the satisfaction of felt preferences. Weak anthropocentrism, nevertheless, because it recognizes the important difference between felt and considered preferences, can adjudicate these disputes.

The most common conflict, the one many environmentalists fear we now face, exists when overly consumptive felt preferences cause serious overexploitation of nature and thereby threaten the resource base necessary for continued human life. This conflict can be resolved by taking human ideals into consideration. If, for example, one's total world view contains as an ideal the continua-

tion of human life and consciousness, then the felt preferences in question are irrational—they are inconsistent with an important ethical ideal. Similarly, if a rational world view recognizing that the human species evolved from other life forms includes an ideal calling for harmony with nature, this ideal, likewise, can function to criticize and alter felt preferences. By building ecological principles and ideals regarding the proper human treatment of nature into a rationally supported world view, weak anthropocentrists can develop vast resources for criticizing felt preferences of human individuals which threaten environmental stability and harmony.

It can be argued that experiences of nature are essential in constructing a rational world view. Likewise, scientific understanding of nature seems essential for the construction of such a world view. Nor would it be very surprising if it turned out that analogies, symbols, and metaphors drawn from nature provided an essential source of guidance in choosing ethical and aesthetic ideals as well.²⁴ Other species and unspoiled places would thereby have great value to humans not only for the way in which they satisfy human felt preferences, but also for the way they serve to enlighten those preferences. Once one recognizes the distinction between felt preferences and considered preferences, nature assumes a crucial role in informing values by contributing to the formation of a rational world view, the criterion by which felt preferences are criticized.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND INTRINSIC VALUE

The conflicts that exist between the levels of distributive fairness and allocation require thoughtful discussion and debate, but that discussion and debate can take place without appeal to the intrinsic value of nonhuman natural objects. The value of ongoing human consciousness and the rules it implies for resource allocation can serve as a basis for criticism of consumptive and exploitative felt preferences. Further, ideas such as that of human harmony with nature and the human species' evolutionary affinity to other species, can serve to strengthen and add flesh to the world view available for the critique of current environmentally destructive behaviors.

When I refer to an environmental ethic, then, I refer, first of all, to the rules of distributive fairness guiding behaviors affecting other human beings' use of the environment. Second, I refer to the rules of allocation affecting the long-term health of the biosphere as a functioning, organic unit. An environmental ethic, nevertheless, is more than these rules: it also encompasses the ideals, values, and principles that constitute a rational world view regarding the human species' relationship to nature. In these sources are bases for evaluating the rules of right action and for criticizing currently felt preferences. Aesthetic

²⁴ See references in note 9 above.

experience of nature is an essential part of the process of forming and applying these ideals and, hence, is also a central part of the environmental ethic here described.

Some nonanthropocentrists, such as J. Baird Callicott, have developed in more detail such ideas as the human affinity to other species and have concluded that it is rational for humans to "attribute" intrinsic value to other species on the basis of affective feelings toward them,²⁵ but if, as I have argued, a sense of harmony with nature can, once it becomes an entrenched part of our world view, serve to correct felt preferences, then it can also serve to bring felt preferences more in line with the requirements of resource allocation without any talk about intrinsic value. Of course, since human beings, as highly evolved animals, share many needs for clean air, clean water, ecosystem services, etc., in the long term with other species it would not be surprising that *speaking as if* nature has intrinsic value could provide useful guidance in adjusting human felt preferences. And since these preferences are now far too exploitative and too consumptive for the good of our own species, showing concern for other species that share our long-term needs for survival might be one useful tool in a very large kit.

The point of this essay, however, has been to show that one need not make the questionable ontological commitments involved in attributing intrinsic value to nature, since weak anthropocentrism provides a framework adequate to criticize current destructive practices to incorporate concepts of human affinity to nature, and to account for the distinctive nature of environmental ethics. All of these are essential elements in an ethic that recognizes the distinction between felt and considered preferences and includes important aesthetic and ethical ideals. These ideals, which can be derived from spiritual sources or from a rationally constructed world view, can be based on and find their locus in human values. And yet they are sufficient to provide the basis of criticism of currently overconsumptive felt preferences. As such they adjudicate between ethical concerns for distributional fairness in the present and concerns of allocation which have reference to the long-term future. Essential to this adjudication is the development of principles of conduct that respect the ongoing integrity of functioning ecosystems seen as wholes. In this way they transcend concern for individualistically expressed felt preferences and focus attention on the stable functioning of ongoing systems. If all of this is true, Occam's razor surely provides a basis for favoring weak anthropocentrism over nonanthropocentrism.

²⁵ Callicott, "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species." Also see Pluhar, "The Justification of an Environmental Ethic" for a somewhat different approach to attribution of intrinsic value.

[22]

Must a concern for the environment be centred on human beings?

Bernard Williams

What is the role of philosophy in questions about the environment? One helpful thing that philosophy can do, obviously, is to apply its analytical resources to clarifying the issues. This is excellent, but it is an aim not exclusively cultivated by philosophy; clear analytic thought is something offered by other disciplines as well. There are more distinctively philosophical lines of thought that bear on these issues, and it is some of these that I should like to pursue. They raise, for instance, questions about the nature of the values that are at issue in environmental discussion.

Questions of this kind are likely to be more distant from practical decision than many that come up for discussion in this area. They are, in particular, difficult to fit into the political process. They can indeed run the risk of seeming frivolous or indecently abstract when questions of practical urgency are at the front of political attention. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of urgent political decisions; some of the broader philosophical considerations are not immediately shaped to *any* practical decision, and it is a mistake to make it seem as though they were. They are, rather, reflective or explanatory considerations, which may help us to understand our feelings on these questions, rather than telling us how to answer them.

There is no special way in which philosophical considerations join the political discussion. They join it, rather, in various of the ways in which other forms of writing or talking may do: ways that include not only marshalling arguments, but also changing people's perceptions a little, or catching their imagination. Too often, philosophers' contributions to these questions seem designed only to reduce the number of thoughts that people can have, by suggesting that they have no right to some conceptions that they have or think that they have. But equally philosophy should be able to liberate, by suggesting to people that they really

Ethics

have a right to some conception, which has been condemned by a simple or restrictive notion of how we may reasonably think.

If we ask about the relations between environmental questions and human values, there is an important distinction to be made straight away. It is one thing to ask whose questions these are; it is another matter to ask whose interests will be referred to in the answers. In one sense – the sense corresponding to the first of these two – conservation and related matters are uncontestedly human issues, because, on this planet at least, only human beings can discuss them and adopt policies that will affect them. That is to say, these are inescapably human questions in the sense that they are questions for humans. This implies something further and perhaps weightier, that the answers must be human answers: they must be based on human values, in the sense of values that human beings can make part of their lives and understand themselves as pursuing and respecting.

The second issue then comes up, of what the content of those values can be. In particular, we have to ask how our answers should be related to our life. Few who are concerned about conservation and the environment will suppose that the answers have to be exclusively human answers in the further sense that the policies they recommend should exclusively favour human beings. But there are serious questions of how human answers can represent to us the value of things that are valued for reasons that go beyond human interests. Our approach to these issues cannot and should not be narrowly anthropocentric. But what is it that we move to when we move from the narrowly anthropocentric, and by what ethical route do we get there?

Many cases that we have to consider of course do directly concern human interests, and we shall perhaps understand our route best if we start with them. There is, first, the familiar situation in which an activity conducted by one person, A, and which is profitable and beneficial to A and perhaps to others as well, imposes a cost on someone else, B. Here the basic question is to decide whether B should be compensated; how much; by whom; and on what principles. A further range of problems arises when various further conditions hold. Thus there may be no specific B: the people affected are identified just as those who are exposed to the activity and affected by it, whoever they may be. When this is so, we have *unallocated* effects (all effects on future generations are unallocated). A different range of questions is raised when we ask whether B is affected in a way that essentially involves B's states of perception or knowledge. Thus B may be affected by the disappearance of songbirds or the blighting of a landscape. These are *experiential* effects. It is important that an effect on B's experience may take the form of a deprivation of

Concern for the environment

which, just because of that deprivation, B is never aware; living under constant atmospheric pollution, B may never know what it is to see the stars. Beyond this, and leaving aside the experiential effects on human beings, there are effects on animals other than human beings. These are *non-human* effects. Finally, what is affected may be neither human nor a member of any other animal species: it may, for instance, be a tree or a mountain. These are *non-animal* effects.

It is of course a major question in very many real cases whether an activity that has one of these other effects on the environment may not also harm human beings: the cutting down of rainforests is an obvious example. To the extent that human interests are still involved, the problems belong with the well-known, if difficult, theory of risk or hazard. This aspect of the problems is properly central to political discussion, and those arguing for conservation and environmental causes reasonably try to mobilize human self-interest as far as possible. But the human concern for other, non-human and non-animal, effects is misrepresented if one tries to reduce it simply to a kind of human self-concern. Since, moreover, the concern for those other effects is itself a human phenomenon, humanity will be itself misrepresented in the process.

Our attitudes to these further kinds of effect are not directed simply to human interests, and in that sense they are not anthropocentric. But they are still our attitudes, expressing our values. How much of a constraint is that? What is involved in the ineliminable human perspective itself? Where might we look for an understanding of this kind of human concern?

There is a point to be made first about the experiences of non-human animals. I have so far mentioned experiential effects only in the context of effects on human beings, but, of course, there are also effects on the experience of other animals to be taken into account. This is also important, but it is not at the heart of conservation and environmental concerns, which focus typically on the survival of species. An experiential concern is likely to be with individual animals rather than with the survival of species, and it is bound to be less interested in the less complex animals; in these respects it is unlike a conservation concern. It also, of course, has no direct interest in the non-living. In all these ways an environmental concern in the sense relevant to conservation is at least broader than a concern with the experiences of other animals. This particularly helps to bring out the point that an environmental concern is not just motivated by benevolence or altruism. (Inasmuch as vegetarianism is motivated by those feelings, it is not the same as a conservation interest.)

There is a well-known kind of theory which represents our attitudes as

Ethics

still radically anthropocentric, even when they are not directed exclusively to human interests. On this account, our attitudes might be understood in terms of the following prescription: treat the non-animal effects, and also the non-human effects that do not involve other animals' experiences, simply as experiential effects on human beings, as types of state that human beings would prefer not to be in, or, in the case of what we call good effects, would prefer to be in. The badness of environmental effects would then be measured in terms of the effect on human experience – basically, our dislike or distaste for what is happening. It might be hoped that by exploiting existing economic theory, this way of thinking could generate prices for pollution.

This way of looking at things involves some basic difficulties, which bring out the fairly obvious fact that this interpretation has not moved far enough from the very simply anthropocentric. It reduces the whole problem to human consciousness of the effects, but people's preferences against being conscious of some non-human or non-living effect are in the first instance preferences against the effect itself. A guarantee that no-one would further know about a given effect would not cheer anyone up about its occurring; moreover it would not be an improvement if people simply ceased to care. A preference of this kind involves a value. A preference not to see a blighted landscape is based on the thought that it is blighted, and one cannot assess the preference – in particular, one cannot decide what kind of weight to give to it – unless one understands that thought, and hence that value.

A different approach is to extend the class of things we may be concerned about beyond ourselves and the sufferings of other animals by supposing that non-animal things, though they have no experiences, do have *interests*. This directly makes the attitudes in question less anthropocentric, but I myself do not think that it is a way in which we are likely to make progress. To say that a thing has interests will help in these connections only if its interests make a claim on us: we may have to allow in some cases that the claim can be outweighed by other claims, but it will have to be agreed that the interests of these things make some claim on us, if the notion of 'interests' is to do the required work. But we cannot plausibly suppose that all the interests which, on this approach, would exist do make a claim on us. If a tree has any interests at all, then it must have an interest in getting better if it is sick; but a sick tree, just as such, makes no claim on us. Moreover, even if individual members of a species had interests, and they made some claims on us, it would remain quite unclear how a species could have interests: but the species is what is standardly the concern of conservation. Yet again, even if it were agreed that a species or kind of thing could have interests, those interests would

Concern for the environment

certainly often make no claim on us: the interests of the HIV virus make no claim on us, and we offend against nothing if our attitude to it is that we take no prisoners.

These objections seem to me enough to discourage this approach, even if we lay aside the difficulties – which are obvious enough – of making sense in the first place of the idea of a thing's having interests if it cannot have experiences. The idea of ascribing interests to species, natural phenomena and so on, as a way of making sense of our concern for these things, is part of a project of trying to extend into nature our concerns for each other, by moralizing our relations to nature. I suspect, however, that this is to look in exactly the wrong direction. If we are to understand these things, we need to look to our ideas of nature itself, and to ways in which it precisely lies outside the domestication of our relations to each other.

The idea of 'raw' nature, as opposed to culture and to human production and control, comes into these matters, and fundamentally so, but not in any simple way. If the notion of the 'natural' is not to distort discussion in a hopelessly fanciful way, as it has distorted many other discussions in the past, we have to keep firmly in mind a number of considerations. First, a self-conscious concern for preserving nature is not itself a piece of nature: it is an expression of culture, and indeed of a very local culture (though that of course does not mean that it is not important). Second, the disappearance of species is itself natural, if anything is. Third, and conversely, many of the things that we want to preserve under an environmental interest are cultural products, and some of them very obviously so, such as cultivated landscapes, and parks.

Last of these general considerations, it is presumably part of the idea of the natural that kinds of creatures have 'natures', and we cannot rule out at the beginning the idea that we might have one, and that if we have one, it might be of a predatory kind. It is one of the stranger paradoxes of many people's attitudes to this subject (and the same applies to some other matters, such as animal rights) that while they supposedly reject traditional pictures of human beings as discontinuous from nature in virtue of reason, and they remind us all the time that other species share the same world with us on (so to speak) equal terms, they unhesitatingly carry over into their picture of human beings a moral transcendence over the rest of nature, which makes us uniquely able, and therefore uniquely obliged, to detach ourselves from any natural determination of our behaviour. Such views in fact firmly preserve the traditional doctrine of our transcendence of nature, and with it our monarchy of the earth; they merely ask us to exercise it in a more benevolent manner.

Granted these various considerations, the concept of the 'natural' is

Ethics

unlikely to serve us very well as anything like a criterion to guide our activities. Nevertheless, our ideas of nature must play an important part in explaining our attitudes towards these matters. Nature may be seen as offering a boundary to our activities, defining certain interventions and certain uncontrolled effects as transgressive.

Many find it appropriate to speak of such a conception as religious. A sense that human beings should not see the world as simply theirs to control, is often thought to have a religious origin, and a 'secular' or 'humanist' attitude is thought to be in this, as in other respects, anthropocentric. In one way, at least, there must be something too simple in this association; while some traditional religious outlooks have embodied feelings of this kind, there are some religions (including many versions of Christianity) that firmly support images of human domination of the world. However this may be, an appeal to religious origins will in any case not be the end of the matter, for the question will remain of why religious outlooks should have this content, to the extent that they do. In particular, the religious sceptic, if he or she is moved by concerns of conservation, might be thought to be embarrassed by the supposed religious origin of these concerns. Other sceptics might hope to talk that sceptic out of his or her concerns by referring these attitudes back to religion. But they should reflect here, as elsewhere, on the force of *Feuerbach's Axiom*, as it may be called: if religion is false, it cannot ultimately explain anything, but itself needs to be explained. If religion is false, it comes entirely from humanity (and even if it is true, it comes in good part from humanity). If it tends to embody a sense of nature that should limit our exploitation of it, we may hope to find the source of that sense in humanity itself.

I end with a line of thought about that source; it is offered as no more than a speculation to encourage reflection on the question. Human beings have two basic kinds of emotional relations to nature: gratitude and a sense of peace, on the one hand, terror and stimulation on the other. It needs no elaborate sociobiological speculation to suggest why these relations should be very basic. The two kinds of feelings famously find their place in art, in the form of its concern with the beautiful and with the sublime. We should consider the fact that when the conscious formulation of this distinction became central to the theory of the arts, at the end of the eighteenth century, at the same time the sublimity and the awesomeness of nature themselves became a subject for the arts, to a much greater extent than had been the case before. Art which was sublime and terrifying of course existed before, above all in literature, but its theme was typically not nature in itself, but rather, insofar as it dealt with nature, nature's threat to culture: in Sophocles, for instance¹, or in

Concern for the environment

King Lear. It is tempting to think that earlier ages had no need for art to represent nature as terrifying: that was simply what, a lot of the time, it was. An artistic reaffirmation of the separateness and fearfulness of nature became appropriate at the point at which for the first time the prospect of an ever-increasing technical control of it became obvious.

If we think in these terms, our sense of restraint in the face of nature, a sense very basic to conservation concerns, will be grounded in a form of fear: a fear not just of the power of nature itself, but what might be called *Promethean fear*, a fear of taking too lightly or inconsiderately our relations to nature. On this showing, the grounds of our attitudes will be very different from that suggested by any appeal to the interests of natural things. It will not be an extension of benevolence or altruism; nor, directly, will it be a sense of community, though it may be a sense of intimate involvement. It will be based rather on a sense of an opposition between ourselves and nature, as an old, unbounded and potentially dangerous enemy, which requires respect. 'Respect' is the notion that perhaps more than any other needs examination here – and not first in the sense of respect for a sovereign, but that in which we have a healthy respect for mountainous terrain or treacherous seas.

Not all our environmental concerns will be grounded in Promethean fear. Some of them will be grounded in our need for the other powers of nature, those associated with the beautiful. But the thoughts which, if these speculations point in the right direction, are associated with the sublime and with Promethean fear will be very important, for they particularly affirm our distinction, and that of our culture, from nature, and conversely, the thought that nature is independent of us, something not made, and not adequately controlled.

We should not think that if the basis of our sentiments is of such a kind, then it is simply an archaic remnant which we can ignore. For, first, Promethean fear is a good general warning device, reminding us still appropriately of what we may properly fear. But apart from that, if it is something that many people deeply feel, then it is something that is likely to be pervasively connected to things that we value, to what gives life the kinds of significance that it has. We should not suppose that we know how this may be, or that we can be sure that we can do without those things.

As I said earlier, it is not these feelings in themselves that matter. Rather, they embody a value which we have good reason, in terms of our sense of what is worthwhile in human life, to preserve, and to follow, to the extent that we can, in our dealings with nature. But there are, undeniably, at least two large difficulties that present themselves when we try to think of how we may do that. First, as I also implied earlier,

Ethics

there is no simple way to put such values into a political sum. Certainly these philosophical or cultural reflections do not help one to do so. It may well be that our ways of honouring such values cannot take an economic form. The patterns must be political; it can only be the mobilization, encouragement and expression of these attitudes, their manifest connection with things that people care about, that can give them an adequate place on the agenda.

The second difficulty concerns not the ways in which we might come to do anything about them, but what we might do. What many conservation interests want to preserve is a nature that is not controlled, shaped, or willed by us, a nature which, as against culture, can be thought of as just *there*. But a nature preserved by us is no longer a nature that is simply not controlled. A natural park is not nature, but a park; a wilderness that is preserved is a definite, delimited, wilderness. The paradox is that we have to use our power to preserve a sense of what is not in our power. Anything we leave untouched we have already touched. It will no doubt be best for us not to forget this, if we are to avoid self-deception and eventual despair. It is the final expression of the inescapable truth that our refusal of the anthropocentric must itself be a human refusal.

Note

- 1 As has been admirably shown by Charles Segal in *Tragedy and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists

DALE JAMIESON

New York University

The contrast typically drawn between utilitarianism and virtue theory is overdrawn. Utilitarianism is a universal emulator: it implies that we should lie, cheat, steal, even appropriate Aristotle, when that is what brings about the best outcomes. In some cases and in some worlds it is best for us to focus as precisely as possible on individual acts. In other cases and worlds it is best for us to be concerned with character traits. Global environmental change leads to concerns about character because the best results will be produced by generally uncoupling my behavior from that of others. Thus, in this case and in this world, utilitarians should be virtue theorists.

1. I begin with an assumption which few would deny, but about which many are in denial: human beings are transforming Earth in ways that are devastating for other forms of life, future human beings, and many of our human contemporaries. The epidemic of extinction now underway is an expression of this. So is the changing climate. Ozone depletion, which continues at a very high rate, is potentially the most lethal expression of these transformations, for without an ozone layer, no life on Earth could exist. Call anthropogenic mass extinctions, climate change and ozone depletion 'the problem of global environmental change' (or 'the problem' for short).¹

2. Philosophers in their professional roles have by and large remained silent about the problem. There are many reasons for this. I believe that one reason is because it is hard to know what to say from the perspective of the reigning moral theories: Kantianism, contractarianism and common-sense pluralism.² While I cannot fully justify this claim here, some background remarks may help to motivate my interest in exploring utilitarian approaches to the problem.

¹ While 'global environmental change' may seem a clumsy or misleading expression, it has come to be the standard way of referring to this cluster of problems in the scientific and policy literatures; see e.g. the website for *The Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change* (<http://www.wiley.co.uk/wileychi/egec/>). For an overview of these problems see The World Resources Institute, The United Nations Environment Programme and The World Bank, *World Resources 2000–2001* (New York, 2000), also available on the web at <http://wristore.com/worres20.html>.

² Some would modify this list of the reigning moral theories by adding or substituting contractualism or virtue ethics.

3. Consider first Kantianism. Christine Korsgaard writes that it is 'nonaccidental' that utilitarians are 'obsessed' with 'population control' and 'the preservation of the environment'.³ For 'a basic feature of the consequentialist outlook still pervades and distorts our thinking: the view that the business of morality is to *bring something about*' [sic].⁴ Korsgaard leaves the impression that a properly conceived moral theory would have little to say about the environment, for such a theory would reject this false picture of the 'business of morality'. This impression is reinforced by the fact that her remark about the environmental obsessions of utilitarians is the only mention of the environment in a book of more than four hundred pages.⁵

It is not surprising that a view that renounces as 'the business of morality' the question of what we should bring about would be disabled when it comes to thinking about how to respond to global environmental change. The silence of Kantianism on this issue is related to two deep features of the theory: its individualism, and its emphasis on the interior. Some Kantian philosophers have tried to overcome the theory's individualism but this is difficult since these two features are closely related.⁶ Kant was not so much interested in actions *simpliciter* as the sources from which they spring. But if our primary concern is how we should act in the face of global environmental change, then we need a theory that is seriously concerned with what people bring about, rather than a theory that is (as we might say) 'obsessed' with the purity of the will.⁷

4. Contractarianism has difficulties in addressing environmental problems in general and global environmental change in particular for at least three reasons. First, it generally has a hard time coping with

³ *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (New York, 1996), p. 300.

⁴ Korsgaard, *Creating*, p. 275. Cf. Annette Baier who thinks that contemporary moral philosophers have not yet escaped the clutches of Kant (*Postures of the Mind* (Minneapolis, 1985), p. 235).

⁵ However Korsgaard does briefly discuss the moral status of plants and animals in *The Sources of Normativity* (New York, 1996), ch. 4, and she extensively discusses Kantian views of animals in her University of Michigan Tanner Lecture, 'Fellow Animals: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals', available at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaard/CMK.FellowCreatures.pdf>.

⁶ See for example the work of Onora O'Neill collected in her *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (New York, 1989). Korsgaard tries to overcome the interiority of the theory by focusing on 'how we should relate to one another' as the subject matter of morality (*Creating*, p. 275).

⁷ There are interpretations of Kant, perhaps most notably that of R. M. Hare (see e.g. *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford, 1965)), which emphasize the idea of universalizability and de-emphasize the notion of the good will. This is not the reading of Kant with which I am concerned here, in part because it has become less influential in recent years, but also because (at least in this respect) it blurs the distinction between Kantianism and utilitarianism.

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists

162

large-scale cooperation problems and the difficulties with assurance to which they give rise. Second, contractarianism has a difficult time with negative 'externalities' – the consequences for me (for example) when you and another consenting adult agree to produce and consume some substance that pollutes the air. It may be possible to overcome these problems, at least in principle, through various revisions of the core theory. But the deeper problem with contractarianism is that it excludes from primary moral consideration all those who are not parties to the relevant agreements.⁸ Yet much of our environmental concern is centered on those who are so excluded – future generations, distant peoples, infants, animals, and so on.

5. Common-sense pluralism is hampered by its intrinsic conservatism.⁹ Although common-sense pluralists morally condemn obvious forms of bad behavior, they are ultimately committed to the view that most of what we do is perfectly acceptable. The role of moral philosophy is primarily to explain and justify our everyday moral beliefs and attitudes rather than seriously to challenge them. From this stance they criticize utilitarianism for being too revisionist and utilitarians for being no fun.¹⁰ But what produces global environmental change is everyday behavior that is innocent from the perspective of common sense: building a nice new house in the country, driving to school to pick up the kids and, indeed, having kids in the first place, to mention just a few examples.¹¹ By the standards of common sense, a moral theory that would prescribe behavior that would prevent or seriously mitigate global environmental change would be shockingly revisionist.

6. Some may say that the reigning moral theories have little to say about our problem because it is not a moral problem. No doubt climate change (for example) presents all sorts of interesting and important

⁸ This is quite clear in the work of David Gauthier and Jan Narveson, for example. For an early discussion of these problems see my 'Rational Egoism and Animal Rights', *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981).

⁹ Although there are many differences and disagreements among them, and some would reject the charge of conservatism, I associate this view with British philosophers such as Jonathan Dancy and Stuart Hampshire, and American philosophers such as Susan Wolf.

¹⁰ Anti-revisionists come in different stripes, but for one version see the introduction to Judith Jarvis Thomson, *The Realm of Rights* (Cambridge, 1990); on the second point, see Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints', *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982), esp. p. 422. For a utilitarian response to such claims, see Peter Singer, *How Are We to Live? Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest* (Buffalo, 1995).

¹¹ On the environmental consequences of American reproductive behavior, see Charles A. S. Hall, R. Gil Pontius Jr, Lisa Coleman and Jae-Young Ko, 'The Environmental Consequences of Having a Baby in the United States', *Wild Earth* 5 (1995).

163

Dale Jamieson

scientific and practical challenges, but this does not make it a moral problem.¹²

The question of what is (and is not) in the scope of morality is itself an interesting and important question worthy of extensive treatment, but here I will confine myself to only a few remarks. Deontologists might not consider global environmental change a moral problem because, on their view, moral problems center on what we intend to bring about, and no one intends to bring about global environmental change.¹³ Similarly, Kantians who reject the idea that 'the business of morality is to *bring something about*' might also have reason to exclude our problem from the domain of morality. But whatever one's official view about the scope of morality, the question of how we should regulate our behavior in the face of climate change, ozone depletion and mass extinctions is important for anyone who cares about nature or human welfare – and these concerns have traditionally been thought to be near the center of moral reflection.

7. For present purposes I assume that our problem is a moral problem. I investigate utilitarian approaches to our problem because utilitarianism, with its unapologetic focus on what we bring about, is relatively well positioned to have something interesting to say about our problem. Moreover, since utilitarianism is committed to the idea that morality requires us to bring about the best possible world, and global environmental change confronts us with extreme, deleterious consequences, there is no escaping the fact that, for utilitarians, global environmental change presents us with a moral problem of great scope, urgency and complexity.

However, I would hope that some of those who are not card-carrying utilitarians would also have interest in this project. Consequences matter, according to any plausible moral theory. Utilitarianism takes the concern for consequences to the limit, and it is generally of interest to see where pure versions of various doctrines wind up leading us. Moreover, I believe that the great traditions in moral philosophy should be viewed as more like research programs than as finished theories that underwrite or imply particular catechisms. For this reason it is

¹² There is room for drawing various subtle distinctions here. Jürgen Habermas claims that '[h]uman responsibility for plants and for preservation of whole species cannot be derived from duties of interaction, and thus cannot be *morally* [sic] justified', but goes on to say that 'there are good *ethical reasons* [sic] that speak in favor of the protection of plants and species'. See his *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, 1993), p. 111.

¹³ For further discussion of deontology and the role of intentions in shaping moral constraints, see Nancy (Ann) Davis, 'Contemporary Deontology', *Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford, 1991), and the references cited therein.

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists 164

interesting to see how successfully a moral tradition can cope with problems that were not envisioned by its progenitors.¹⁴

8. While Korsgaard castigates utilitarianism for its environmental obsessions, many environmental philosophers see utilitarianism as a doctrine that celebrates consumption rather than preservation. Specifically, it has been accused of preferring redwood decks to redwood trees and boxes of toothpicks to old growth forests. Other environmental philosophers argue that utilitarianism cannot account for the value of biodiversity, ecosystems or endangered species, and go on to condemn the theory for 'sentientism' and 'moral extensionism'. According to these critics, rather than presenting us with a new environmental ethic, utilitarianism is the theory that has brought us to the edge of destruction.¹⁵

But utilitarianism has an important strength that is often ignored by its critics: It requires us to do what is best. This is why any objection that reduces to the claim that utilitarianism requires us to do what is not best, or even good, cannot be successful. Any act or policy that produces less than optimal consequences fails to satisfy the principle of utility. Any theory that commands us to perform such acts cannot be utilitarian.¹⁶

As I understand utilitarianism, it is the theory that we are morally required to act in such a way as to produce the best outcomes. It is not wedded to any particular account of what makes outcomes good, of what makes something an outcome, or even what makes something an action.¹⁷ Moreover, having good theoretical answers to these questions

¹⁴ I hope it is clear that my intention thus far has been only to show that, on a first approximation, in comparison with its rivals, utilitarianism appears well positioned to address the problem, and in this regard is worthy of detailed investigation. I do not mean to suggest that alternative approaches, however resourceful, are totally incapable of providing interesting responses to our problem.

¹⁵ For such criticisms see J. Baird Callicott, 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair', *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980); Holmes Rolston III, 'Respect for Life: Counting what Singer Finds of no Account', *Singer and his Critics*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Oxford, 1999); Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject* (Lanham, 1997); John Rodman, 'The Liberation of Nature', *Inquiry* 20 (1977); and Mark Sagoff, 'Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce', *Osgood Hall Law Journal* 22 (1984).

¹⁶ Cf. Korsgaard, who insightfully writes that '[u]sually the "standard objections" that one school of thought raises against another are question-begging in deep and disguised ways' (*Creating*, p. xiii).

¹⁷ In characterizing utilitarianism in this way, I chime with Liam Murphy (*Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (New York, 2000), p. 6) rather than with Shelly Kagan who uses the term 'consequentialism' for what I call utilitarianism; see his discussion in *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, 1998). For further discussion of these terms, see my 'Consequentialism', in 'Ethics and Values', *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* (EOLSS), ed. R. Elliot, developed under the auspices of the UNESCO (Oxford, 2002), available on the web at <http://www.eolss.net>.

does not mean that we will always know what is right when it comes to practical decision-making. And even when we think we know what is right we may change our minds in the light of reflection, analysis or experience. If utilitarianism is true, embracing the theory may be the first step towards doing what is right, but it is certainly not the last.¹⁸

9. Utilitarianism is a highly context-sensitive moral theory. Since my concern here is with how a utilitarian should respond to an actual moral problem, I need to make some simplifying assumptions in order to produce responses that are more definitive than 'it depends'. So in what follows, I will assume that the utilitarian in question holds fairly generic and reasonably traditional views about the matters mentioned in the previous paragraph (e.g. that well-being is at least one of the things that are good, that my causing something to occur or obtain is part of what makes something an outcome of my action, etc.). I will also assume that taken together these views imply that, all things considered, global environmental change is bad (or at least not best). Furthermore, I will assume that the utilitarian in question is a person whose psychology is more or less like mine, and that we have roughly the same beliefs about how the world is put together. I do not mean anything fancy by this – only that, for example, our decision-making is not decisively affected by our belief that this world is just a training ground for the next, that most of the world's leaders are agents of an alien conspiracy, or that I am as likely to be a brain in a vat as a guy with a job. Given this background, in the face of global environmental change, a utilitarian agent faces the following question: how should I live so as to produce the best outcomes?

10. Part of what should be taken into account in answering this question is that global environmental change presents us with the world's biggest collective action problem. Together we produce bad outcomes that no individual acting alone has the power to produce or prevent. Moreover, global environmental change often manifests in ways that are quite indirect. The effects of climate change (for example) include sea level rises, and increased frequencies of droughts, storms, and extreme temperatures. These effects in turn may lead to food shortages, water crises, disease outbreaks, and transformations of

¹⁸ Indeed it may not even be the first step. Utilitarianism may imply that utilitarianism should be an 'esoteric morality'. Whether or not it has this implication depends on facts about particular people and societies. For discussion of esoteric morality see Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edn. (London, 1907), p. 490; and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York, 1984), pt. 1 (esp. ch. 1).

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists

166

economic, political and social structures.¹⁹ Ultimately, millions may die as a result, but climate change will never be listed as the cause of death on a death certificate. Because our individual actions are not decisive with respect to outcomes, and we are buffered both geographically and temporally from their effects, many people do not believe that their behavior has any effect in producing these consequences.²⁰ Even when people do see themselves as implicated in producing these outcomes, they are often confused about how to respond, and uncertain about how much can reasonably be demanded of them.

For a utilitarian, this much seems clear: agents should minimize their own contributions to global environmental change and act in such a way as to cause others to minimize their contributions as well. However, in principle, these injunctions could come apart. It is possible that the best strategy for a utilitarian agent would be hypocrisy: increasing my own contributions to the problem could be necessary to maximally reducing contributions overall (perhaps because my flying all over the world advocating the green cause is essential to its success). Or asceticism could be the best strategy: paying no attention to anyone's contributions but my own might be the most effective way for me to reduce overall contributions to the problem.²¹ There may be particular utilitarian agents for whom one of these strategies is superior to a 'mixed' strategy. However, it is plausible to suppose that for most utilitarian agents under most conditions, the most effective strategy for addressing the problem would involve both actions primarily directed towards minimizing their own contributions, and actions primarily directed towards causing others to minimize their contributions.²² This

¹⁹ For the most recent, authoritative and systematic account of the consequences of climate change, see *Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation & Vulnerability*, ed. James J. McCarthy, Osvaldo F. Canziani, Neil A. Leary, David J. Dokken and Kasey S. White (New York, 2001), and the updates found on the web at <http://www.ipcc.ch/>. See also my 'The Epistemology of Climate Change: Some Morals for Managers', *Society and Natural Resources* 4 (1991).

²⁰ On this general issue see Jonathan Glover, "It Makes No Difference Whether or Not I Do It", *Applied Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (New York, 1986); and Parfit, *Reasons*, ch. 3.

²¹ It should be obvious that I am using 'hypocrisy' and 'asceticism' as technical terms; a full-blooded analysis of these concepts would reveal richer and more subtle conditions for application than what is suggested by the text.

²² Since such a strategy may well involve the construction and inculcation of norms, I believe that nothing I say here is inconsistent with Philip Pettit's discussion of norms as responses to collective action problems in part III of his *Rules, Reasons, and Norms* (Oxford, 2002). One way of relating our accounts would be to say that the account that I develop is a (relatively) thick description of what utilitarian agents would have to be like in order for relevant norms to emerge and to reduce their own contributions to the problem. Although my focus is primarily on individual agents, the argument generalizes to all similarly situated utilitarian agents. Moreover, I believe that the importance of individual agents in addressing collective action problems is not fully appreciated by many theorists (see sect. 19 for further discussion).

167

Dale Jamieson

would seem to follow naturally (but not logically) from the fact that we are social animals who strongly influence others and are strongly influenced by them.

11. In light of these considerations, how should a utilitarian agent live in order to address the problem? I believe that one feature of a successful response would be non-contingency. Non-contingency requires agents to act in ways that minimize their contributions to global environmental change, and specifies that acting in this way should generally not be contingent on an agent's beliefs about the behavior of others.

The case for non-contingency flows from the failure of contingency with respect to this problem. Contingency, if it is to be successful from a utilitarian point of view, is likely to require sophisticated calculation. But when it comes to large-scale collective action problems, calculation invites madness or cynicism – madness, because the sums are impossible to do, or cynicism because it appears that both morality and self-interest demand that 'I get mine', since whatever others do, it appears that both I and the world are better off if I fail to cooperate. Indeed, it is even possible that in some circumstances the best outcome would be one in which I cause you to cooperate and me to defect.²³ Joy-riding in my '57 Chevy will not in itself change the climate, nor will my refraining from driving stabilize the climate, though it might make me late for Sierra Club meetings. These are the sorts of considerations that lead people to drive their '57 Chevies to Sierra Club meetings, feeling good about the quality of their own lives, but bad about the prospects for the world. Nations reason in similar ways. No single nation has the power either to cause or to prevent climate change. Thus nations talk about how important it is to act while waiting for others to take the bait. Since everyone, both individuals and nations, can reason in this way, it appears that calculation leads to a downward spiral of non-cooperation.²⁴

This should lead us to give up on calculation, and giving up on calculation should lead us to give up on contingency. Instead of looking to moral mathematics for practical solutions to large-scale collective action problems, we should focus instead on non-calculative generators of behavior: character traits, dispositions, emotions and what I shall call 'virtues'. When faced with global environmental change, our general policy should be to try to reduce our contribution regardless of the behavior of others, and we are more likely to succeed in doing this by

²³ I discuss this objection further in sect. 19.

²⁴ For further argument to this conclusion see Donald Regan, *Utilitarianism and Cooperation* (New York, 1980).

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists 168

developing and inculcating the right virtues than by improving our calculative abilities.²⁵

12. This may sound like a familiar argument against act-utilitarianism. Act-utilitarianism is the theory that directs agents to perform that act which brings about the best outcome, relative to other acts that the agent could perform. Some philosophers have argued on conceptual grounds that agents who are guided by act-utilitarianism would not produce the best outcomes. This is because certain goods (e.g. cooperation, valuable motives, loving relationships) are inaccessible to, or unrealized by, agents who always perform the best act.²⁶ Thus, rather than being 'direct utilitarians' who focus only on acts, we should be 'indirect utilitarians' who focus on motives, maxims, policies, rules or traits.

The first point to notice is that it does not follow that act-utilitarians do not bring about the best world from the fact (if it is one) that certain goods are inaccessible to, or unrealized by, act-utilitarians. The world may be constructed in such a way that the best state of affairs is not one in which these values obtain, however important they may be taken individually. For example, the pleasure of drinking fine wine is inaccessible to, or unrealized by, a teetotaler, but it does not follow from this that the teetotaler's life is not the best life for him to lead, all things considered (i.e. the one that produces the most utility). By declining the pleasures of wine, the teetotaler may mobilize resources (both financial and energetic) that allow him to realize more utility than he otherwise would if he did not abstain from alcohol.²⁷

However, what I have said thus far is consistent with the rejection of act-utilitarianism, but my main concern here is not with the architecture of various versions of utilitarianism. My focus is on the moral psychology of a utilitarian agent faced with the problem, rather than on the conceptual structure of value. I agree that such

²⁵ While the virtues, as I understand them here, are non-calculative generators of behavior, their exercise does not exclude deliberation. I am indebted to Steve Gardiner and Jerrold Katz for helpful discussion of these points.

²⁶ For some important discussions of these points see Regan, *Utilitarianism*; Allan F. Gibbard, 'Rule Utilitarianism: Merely an Illusory Alternative?', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 43 (1965); Robert M. Adams, 'Motive Utilitarianism', *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976); and Peter Railton, 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (1984).

²⁷ Some may feel the pull of this example, but find it out of the question that a life without friends could be utility-maximizing. But if we assume that utility-maximizing behavior is frequently associated with acting on agent-neutral reasons, then it is not difficult to see why strong personal relationships might lead us to act in less than optimistic ways. Of course, even if this is true there is no question that many of us here and now would do worse by abandoning our friends and setting ourselves up as rootless cosmopolitan utility-maximizers. For a recent discussion of some of these issues, see Elizabeth Ashford, 'Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Partiality', *The Journal of Philosophy* 97 (2000).

a utilitarian agent should not adopt act-utilitarianism as a decision-procedure and try to transform herself into a moment-by-moment, act-utilitarian calculating device. One reason is because it is not possible for the attempt to succeed. We are cognitively and motivationally weak creatures, with a shortage of time, facts and benevolence. Our very nature as biological and psychological creatures is at war with the injunction, 'transform yourself into a moment-to-moment, act-utilitarian calculating device and act on this basis'. There is no reason to think that attempting to live an impossible dream will produce more good than any other course of action.

This seems so obvious that I sometimes (darkly) wonder who invented act-utilitarianism, when, where, and for what purpose. As a theoretical construct it has its uses, but the idea that a utilitarian moralist must embrace a psychologically impossible doctrine on pain of inconsistency is to misunderstand the very project of moral theorizing.²⁸

Clearly Bentham and Mill were strangers to this doctrine.²⁹ They were promiscuous in their application of the principle of utility to acts, motives, rules, principles, policies, laws, and more besides.³⁰ Rather than beginning with the principle of utility and then demanding that people become gods or angels in order to conform to it, they start from a picture of human psychology which they then bring to the principle. While conforming to the principle of utility is supposed to make us and the world better, embedding the principle in human psychology is what makes the principle practical. Bentham and Mill were aware of the fact that the world comes to people in chunks of different sizes: sometimes we must decide between acts, at other times between rules or policies. Indeed, acts can express rules and policies, and rules and policies are instantiated in acts. One of the most difficult problems we face as moral agents is trying to figure out exactly what we are choosing between in particular cases.³¹ Yes, textbook act-utilitarianism is a non-starter as an answer to our question, but who would have thought otherwise?³²

²⁸ My quarrel here is not with those who have distinguished act- from rule-utilitarianism as part of an investigation of the varieties of utilitarianism, but rather with the way in which this distinction has subsequently been canonized and then read back into the tradition. For an excellent study in the former spirit see David Lyons, *Forms and Limits of Utilitarianism* (Oxford, 1965).

²⁹ For a contrary view see Henry R. West, *An Introduction to Mill's Utilitarian Ethics* (New York, 2004). But see also Fred Berger, *Happiness, Justice, and Freedom: The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (Berkeley, 1984).

³⁰ Cf. Michael Slote's discussion of Bentham in 'Utilitarian Virtue', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy Volume XIII Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue*, ed. P. French, T. Uehling Jr and H. Wettstein (Notre Dame, 1988).

³¹ Onora O'Neill has written insightfully about this in the context of Kantian ethics (*Constructions*, ch. 9). See also Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (New York, 1979), pp. 263–7.

³² In unpublished work I have tried to develop a perspective on the purposes of moral theorizing that I believe are implicit in the tradition of consequentialist moral philosophy.

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists 170

Ultimately, the most important problem with act-utilitarianism is also a problem with indirect views that focus on motives, rules, or whatever. All of these accounts are 'local', in that they privilege some particular 'level' at which we should evaluate the consequences of actions that are open to us. Rather than adopting any such local view, we should be 'global' utilitarians and focus on whatever level of evaluation in a particular situation is conducive to bringing about the best state of affairs.³³ Derek Parfit saw this point clearly when he wrote: 'Consequentialism covers, not just acts and outcomes, but also desires, dispositions, beliefs, emotions, the color of our eyes, the climate and everything else. More exactly, C covers anything that could make outcomes better or worse.'³⁴

13. Some may sympathize with my rejection of utilitarian calculation, but think that in appealing to the virtues I have thrown myself into the arms of something worse. There are other, safer, havens for refugees from utilitarian calculation, it might be thought.

Some may say that what is needed to address our problem is coercive state power, not virtuous citizens. I do not see these as mutually exclusive alternatives. Legitimate states can only arise and be sustained among people who act, reason and respond in particular ways. The mere existence of a collective action problem does not immediately give rise to an institution for managing it, independent of the values and motivations of actors. Indeed, if it were otherwise, we would not be confronted by our problem. While it is true that our problem cannot fully be addressed without the use of state power, this observation does not answer or make moot the questions that I am asking.

Others may say that the solution to our problem consists in developing collective or shared intentions of the right sort. One version of this view holds that individual agents need to form intentions 'to play one's part in a joint act' or to 'see themselves as *working together* [*sic*] to promote human well-being'.³⁵ It may be that such intentions would

I discuss these ideas under the rubric 'naturalized moral theory'. For the beginnings of such an account see my 'Method and Moral Theory', *Companion*, ed. P. Singer.

³³ This distinction between global and local utilitarianism derives from the felicitous distinction between global and local consequentialism drawn by Philip Pettit and Michael Smith, who argue persuasively for the superiority of the global view in their 'Global Consequentialism', in *Morality, Rules, and Consequences: A Critical Reader*, ed. B. Hooker, E. Mason and D. Miller (Edinburgh, 2000). See also Shelly Kagan's 'Evaluative Focal Points' in the same volume.

³⁴ Parfit, *Reasons*, p. 25.

³⁵ For the first view see Christopher Kutz, *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age* (New York, 2000), p. 11; for the second, Murphy, *Moral Demands*, p. 96 (note, however, that Murphy's remark is in the context of a larger investigation of an individual's moral duty of beneficence under conditions of partial compliance). Other approaches to collective or shared intentions advocate revising our conceptions of agents or of intending, rather than focusing on the content of intentions. For example, John Searle holds that jointly

have an important role to play in successfully addressing our problem, but questions remain about what exactly such intentions consist in, how they arise, what sort of people would have them, and exactly why and in what circumstances they would be adopted.³⁶ My investigation is meant to address these further questions. In this respect my account can be seen as complementary to, or even perhaps as part of, the project of investigating shared or collective intentions as solutions to collective action problems.

14. It is now time for me to say something more constructive about my conception of a virtue. Julia Driver's account is helpful as a first approximation: a moral virtue is 'a character trait that systematically produces or gives rise to the good'.³⁷ Clearly this account should be supplemented to reflect the fact that the emotions are closely associated with the virtues.³⁸ Emotions play an important role in sustaining patterns of behavior that express such putative virtues as loyalty, courage, persistence, and so on. Without emotions to sustain them, it is difficult to imagine how parenting, friendship and domestic partnership could exist among creatures like us.³⁹

Even if Driver's account were supplemented in this way, it would still remain quite generic, since there are different understandings of such expressions as 'character trait', 'systematically', 'produces' and 'gives rise to'. Moreover this account would leave many important questions unanswered, including those about the relations between the virtues and human flourishing, and about the relations between the virtues

intentional action can only be explained by postulating an irreducible form of intending that he calls 'we-intending' (in his *Intentionality* [Cambridge, 1983], ch. 3); for discussion see Kutz, *Complicity*, ch. 3.

³⁶ Christopher McMahon (in his *Collective Rationality and Collective Reasoning* (New York, 2001)) tells us that the solution to prisoners' dilemmas (a class of problems closely related to our problem) is to treat them as pure coordination problems. However, in prisoners' dilemmas each agent is better off detecting whatever other agents do while this is not the case in pure coordination problems. Since prisoners' dilemmas have a different structure than pure coordination problems, clear, convincing motivation is needed for why we should view them in the way that McMahon suggests, and some account needs to be provided of what agents would have to be like in order to act in the preferred way. In the absence of such accounts, this gambit seems merely to change the subject. For further discussion, see Gerald Gaus, 'Once More Unto the Breach, My Dear Friends, Once More', *Philosophical Studies* 116 (2003); and Michael Weber, 'The Reason to Contribute to Cooperative Schemes', in the same issue. My brief remarks in this paragraph are not meant to minimize the contributions of McMahon, Kutz and others, but only to suggest that more detailed work needs to be done.

³⁷ Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (New York, 2001), p. 108.

³⁸ Here I agree with Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford, 1999), pt. 2. Driver also discusses the relations between the virtues and the emotions, but I am not clear what her considered view is on this matter.

³⁹ Cf. Robert Frank who has argued that emotions promote self-interest by solving commitment problems, in his *Passions within Reason* (New York, 1988).

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists 172

themselves. However, answering these questions is not required for my purposes. What matters to me is the contrast between calculative and non-calculative generators of action, and I use 'the virtues' as the name for a large class of the latter.⁴⁰

Some virtue theorists will not be very welcoming of this project. They would deny that an account of the sort I want to give constitutes a version of 'virtue ethics'. For they hold that 'What is definitive of virtue ethics... is that it makes virtues not just important to, but also in some sense basic in, the moral structure.'⁴¹ Perhaps in deference to this view, what I should be understood as exploring is when an account of utility-maximizing requires a theory of virtue.⁴²

15. Here is a reminder of what I am claiming. Given our nature and the nature of our problem, non-contingency is more likely to be utility-maximizing than contingency. This is because contingency is likely to require calculation, and calculation is not likely to generate utility-maximizing behavior. Thus, in the face of our problem, utilitarians should take virtues seriously. Focusing on the virtues helps to regulate and coordinate behavior, express and contribute to the constitution of community through space and time, and helps to create empathy, sympathy and solidarity among moral agents.

16. The most serious problem with the idea that non-contingency should be an important part of a utilitarian theory of how to respond to our problem is that it is in tension with an underappreciated, but extremely important, general feature of utilitarianism: non-complacency. Non-complacency refers to the fact that ways of life and patterns of action should be dynamically responsive to changing circumstances, taking advantage of unique opportunities to produce goodness, and always striving to do better.

⁴⁰ However, not all non-calculative generators of action count as virtues. Some are too trivial, others are vices, and still others would be too far from the traditional notion of a virtue even for me to call virtues.

⁴¹ James Griffin, *Value Judgement: Improving Our Ethical Beliefs* (New York, 1996), p. 113; see also Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (New York, 1992). For a more relaxed view about what counts as virtue ethics see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York, 1993).

⁴² An objection to virtue theory that is beginning to gain currency draws on results from social psychology that show that contextual factors are stronger predictors of behavior than facts about individual character. For such objections, see Gilbert Harman, 'Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error', reprinted in his *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, 2000); and John Doris, 'Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics', *NOUS* 32 (1998), and his *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (New York, 2002). Because I am not committed to any particular account of the virtues, much less to one that makes them radically internal to agents rather than relative to contexts, I do not believe that this objection threatens the claims that I advance here.

Consider first how non-complacency counts against some versions of indirect utilitarianism, especially those motivated by the desire to produce moral judgments that are more closely aligned with common-sense morality than the judgments that act-utilitarianism would seem to deliver.⁴³ Views motivated by this desire can lead to a kind of moral complacency that is at odds with any theory that is directed towards producing the best outcomes. Consider two examples.

Suppose that I am a motive-utilitarian who acts on the set of motives that produces more utility overall than any other set of motives that I could have. Imagine that in a one-off situation it is clear that I could produce the most good by acting in a way that is horrific from the point of view of common-sense morality, and that this action is not consistent with my set of standing motivations. A conscientious utilitarian should struggle to perform this one-off act. If she fails in her struggle, she should regret her failure – not because a utilitarian should value regret for its own sake, but because feelings of regret are a characteristic response to the failure to do one's duty. Such feelings of regret may also have a role to play in steeling the agent so that in the future she can perform such one-off acts, however repugnant they may seem to her. Someone who complacently comforted herself with the knowledge that her motives are the best ones to have overall ought to be suspect from a utilitarian point of view, for she acts in a way that she knows is wrong and does not even try to do better.

A similar story can be told about someone who knows he ought to save a stranger rather than his brother in some moment of stress. Such a person, insofar as he is a utilitarian, cannot really be satisfied by telling himself that on the whole he does better acting on the intuitive level rather than ascending to the critical level. He would be like a pilot who on the whole does better flying at 30,000 feet rather than ascending to 40,000 feet, comforting himself about the importance of acting on the basis of good rules of thumb while he is headed directly towards a fully-loaded 747. He may not be able to bring himself to do the right thing, but more than shoulder-shrugging is called for.

Non-complacency should lead a utilitarian to moral improvement in two ways. First, she should be sensitive to the fact that circumstances change. What is the best motivational set in an analog world may not be best in a digital one. Moving from Minnesota to California may bring with it not only a change of wardrobe, but also a different

⁴³ Bernard Williams fastens onto a somewhat similar point in his critique of Hare's 'two-level' theory (see his 'The Structure of Hare's Theory', *Hare and Critics*, ed. D. Seanor and N. Fotion (Oxford, 1988)). But while Williams emphasizes the psychological untenability of living simultaneously at both the 'intuitive' and 'critical' levels, my criticism is specifically aimed at someone who rests content with rules of thumb when she is committed to the view that morality requires her to do what is best.

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists 174

optimal motivational set. Second, a utilitarian should constantly strive to shape his motivational set in such a way that his behavior is ever more responsive to particular situations. Broad motives and rules of thumb are starting points for a utilitarian agent, but not where he should aspire to end his struggle for moral improvement.

The problem is that non-complacency, which seems to me to be important and underappreciated by indirect utilitarians, appears to be in tension with non-contingency, which is required in order to address large-scale collective action problems. Virtues give utilitarians a way of making human behavior inflexible enough to deal with collective action problems, but outside the context of collective action problems it is flexible patterns of behavior that generally are needed for utility-maximizing.

17. One approach would be to relax the demand of non-complacency by giving up utilitarianism in favor of progressive consequentialism. Progressive consequentialism requires us (only?!) to produce a progressively better world rather than the best world. Abandoning the maximizing requirement of utilitarianism in favor of a diachronic duty to improve the world would help relieve, but not entirely resolve, the tension between non-contingency and non-complacency. For as long as non-contingency is in the picture there are going to be conflicts between the character traits that it evokes, and the demand of non-complacency that on at least some occasions we act in ways that are contrary to what these traits would manifest. Relaxing the demands of duty will make these conflicts rarer but will not eliminate them entirely.⁴⁴

18. Another, complementary, approach is to develop a highly domain-specific account of the virtues. When it comes to global environmental change, utilitarians should generally be inflexible, virtuous greens, but in most other domains they should be flexible calculators.

The problem with this is that life is not very good at keeping its domains distinct. Suppose that my friend Peter asks me to give him a lift to an Oxfam meeting and that this is the only way that he will be able to attend.⁴⁵ However, I am an inflexible, virtuous green when it comes to global environmental change. My green dispositions cause my hand to tremble at the very thought of driving, and I cannot bring myself to give Peter a lift to the meeting. If I were a globally flexible

⁴⁴ There is quite a lot more to be said about progressive consequentialism. I say a little more in 'Consequentialism', and Robert Elliot discusses this view under the rubric 'improving Consequentialism' in his *Faking Nature* (New York, 1997).

⁴⁵ Let us assume that in this case the benefits and harms do not cross domains: the benefits of Peter attending the meeting attach only to famine relief and the harms of my driving are confined to their contribution to global environmental change.

calculator instead, I would not care in what domain utilities are located. If driving Peter to the meeting would produce better consequences than my refusing, then I would give Peter a lift. Thus it would seem that non-contingency in the domain of global environmental change may not contribute to realizing what is best overall.

One response would be to say that in this case I should calculate about whether to calculate. In one way this response is correct and in another way it is wrong. As theorists we should try to identify those cases in which calculation is likely to lead to optimal outcomes and those in which it will not, and this requires calculating the utility of calculating in various domains (as indeed we did informally in the previous paragraph). But as utilitarian agents we should not calculate about whether to calculate, for this would defeat the very possibility of inculcating the character traits that make us virtuous greens. And anyway, such higher-order calculation threatens an infinite regress of calculations as well as generally straining psychological credulity.⁴⁶

So what should I say to Peter? First, the problems of global environmental change are so severe and the green virtues so generally benign that the domain over which they should dominate is very large. Second, the green virtues would never take hold if their particular expressions were systematically exposed to the test of utility; so if we think that having green virtues is utility-maximizing overall then we ought not to so expose their expressions (except in extreme cases, of which, I have been assuming, this is not one). So too bad for Peter and his Oxfam meeting.

But the problem of calculation reappears with the words, 'except in extreme cases'. For a utilitarian, the commitment to non-contingency must include such an 'escape clause'. If this were an extreme case (suppose that the lives and well-being of the entire population of a medium-sized African country turned on Peter attending the Oxfam meeting) and I could not bring myself to give Peter a lift, then I would be no better than one of those compulsive rule-worshippers whom utilitarians love to bash. But without calculation, how can I know whether or not this is an extreme case?

Part of the answer is that we are simply able to recognize some extreme cases as such: we just do it. When the house is on fire, a child is screaming, atrocities are being committed and civilizations threatened, moral mathematics are not needed in order to see that the patterns of behavior that are generally best may not be up to it in the present case. Of course there may also be cases in which calculation would be needed in order to see that it would be best to break patterns of behavior given

⁴⁶ Such problems are much discussed in the economics literature under the rubric of 'optimal stopping rules'. See, for example, G. J. Stigler's classic, 'The Economics of Information', *Journal of Political Economy* 69 (1961).

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists

176

to us by the green virtues. But on these occasions the virtuous green will just have to forgo the best, trusting in the overall utility-maximizing power of the green virtues.

19. There is a further challenge to which I have already briefly alluded (in section 11). If others are having a good time changing climate, destroying ozone and driving species to extinction, and the green cause is hopeless, then it appears that I am morally obliged to join in the fun. A utilitarian should not, at great cost to herself, plow through the snow on her bike while everyone else is blowing past her in their gas-guzzling 'suburban utility vehicles' (SUVs). If the world is to be lost anyway, then the morally responsible utilitarian will try to have a good time going down with the planet. If the best outcome (preventing global environmental change) is beyond my control and the worst outcome would be for me to live a life of misery and self-denial in a futile attempt to bring about the inaccessible best outcome, then the best outcome that I can produce may involve my living a high-consumption lifestyle. But everyone can reason in this way and so we may arrive at the conclusion, not just that it is permissible to live like a normal American, but that utilitarians are morally obliged to do so. This seems truly shocking.

There are really two arguments here. The first argument concerns the decision process of a single agent; the second claims that the first argument generalizes to all similarly situated agents.

Consider the second argument first. This argument trades on equivocating as to whether or not the best outcome is in fact accessible to an agent. Imagine a world of only two agents, Kelly and Sean. From Kelly's point of view, if it is clear that Sean will fail to behave in an environmentally friendly way, then it may be best for Kelly to fail to do so as well. But if Sean is in the same position with respect to her decision as Kelly, then it cannot be taken as given that Sean will not engage in the environmentally friendly behavior, for that is just what she is reasoning about. If there is any point to her reasoning about this, then the environmentally friendly behavior must be accessible to her, contrary to what we assumed when we considered Kelly's decision process. The apparent generalization of the first argument introduces an equivocation that is not implicit in the first argument itself.⁴⁷

The first argument should not be confused with what might be called the Nero objection. This objection states that, just as Nero fiddled while Rome burned, so a utilitarian agent should fiddle (or its functional equivalent) while global environmental change ravages the

⁴⁷ There are ways of trying to revive the second argument by casting it in probabilistic terms, but I cannot consider that possibility here. My understanding of a range of such cases has benefited greatly from discussions with Scott (Drew) Schroeder.

planet. Since Nero's fiddling was morally horrendous, the functionally equivalent utilitarian fiddling must be morally horrendous as well. However, Nero's fiddling and that of the utilitarian are not equivalent in relevant respects. What is horrendous about the image of Nero fiddling while Rome burns is that he probably set the fires, or could have had them put out. Rather than making the best of a bad situation, he was making a bad situation.⁴⁸ This is clearly forbidden by utilitarianism.

Here is a better account of the first argument. In the domain of global environmental change-relevant behavior, what we want is inflexible green behavior, but even here it should not be too inflexible. Suppose that there is some threshold of cooperation that must be surpassed if global environmental change is to be mitigated. If this threshold will not be surpassed regardless of what I do, then it might be best for me to act in some other way than to exemplify green virtues. But calculating about whether the threshold has been met seems to defeat the advantage of inflexibility that green virtues are supposed to deliver. Moreover, if the calculation delivers the result that I ought to behave in a way that is environmentally destructive, then this seems to contradict the result that we know morality must deliver. It is for reasons such as these that some people think that moving from a focus on actions to a focus on character does not solve collective action problems.

Whether or not the shift of focus from actions to character succeeds in solving the problem depends on exactly what the problem is. If utilitarianism really implied that I should throw tequila bottles out of the window while commuting to work in my SUV, this result would not on the face of it be any more shocking than some other possibilities that utilitarianism can countenance in various hypothetical situations: for example, that in some cases I might be morally obliged to hang innocent people, torture prisoners or carpet-bomb cities. The reason that these objections do not sway anyone with utilitarian sympathies is because, by hypothesis, all of these cases presuppose that my acting in these horrific ways would produce the best possible world.⁴⁹ If the world is in such a deplorable state that hanging innocent people would actually constitute an improvement, that is surely not the fault of utilitarian theory. On the other hand, if the assumption that the contemplated act is optimal is not in play, then the critic is making the ubiquitous error (discussed earlier) of purporting to show that utilitarianism directs

⁴⁸ The *locus classicus* for this image of Nero is Gibbon, but recent scholarship suggests that Nero has been maligned: that he neither set the fires, nor was indifferent to the destruction they caused. See Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London, 1984).

⁴⁹ R. M. Hare makes a similar argument with respect to slavery; see his 'What is Wrong with Slavery', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8 (1979).

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists 178

agents to act in ways that make the world worse or less good than it could be. As we have seen, utilitarianism can have no such implication.

If the best outcome is truly inaccessible to me, then it is not obviously implausible to suppose that I have a duty to make the best of a bad situation.⁵⁰ When I was a kid, growing up in a neighborhood that would certainly have been a 'first-strike' target had there been a nuclear war between the Americans and the Russians, we often seriously discussed the following question. Suppose that you know that They have launched their missiles and that We have retaliated (or vice versa), and that in twenty minutes the planet will be incinerated. What should you do?⁵¹ The idea that we should enjoy the life that remains to us may not be the only plausible response to this question, but it is surely not an implausible one.

What many people find grating about this answer, I think, is the idea that we have a duty to enjoy life in such a situation. Some might agree that it would be prudentially good to do so, but find it outrageous that morality would be so intrusive, right up to the end of the world. When it comes to the case in which the green cause is hopeless, it might be thought that matters are even worse. It is one thing to say that it is permissible or excusable to abandon our green commitments in such circumstances; it is another thing entirely to say that we have an affirmative duty to join the ranks of the enemy, and to enjoy the very activities that destroy the features of nature that we cherish.⁵²

This objection has proceeded under the assumption that we might find ourselves in circumstances in which we know that living according to our green values would be entirely ineffectual, and that we would enjoy helping ourselves to the pleasures of consumerism. On these implausible assumptions, the objector is correct in claiming that utilitarianism would require us to join the side of the environmental despoilers. However, there is nothing really new in principle about this kind of case. It is another example of either the demandingness of

⁵⁰ Here I break with Christopher Kutz (*Complicity*, pp. 124–32) who rejects what he calls 'consequentialism' for failing to explain why it is wrong to participate in a bad practice whose occurrence is overdetermined. For an alternative view to Kutz's, see Frank Jackson, 'Group Morality', *Metaphysics and Morality: Essays in Honour of J. J. C. Smart*, ed. Philip Pettit, Richard Sylvan and Jean Norman (Oxford, 1987). Intuitions about overdetermination cases seem to run in different ways, depending on particular cases and how they are described; a full treatment of this problem is beyond the aspirations of this article. I have benefited here from reading unpublished work by Frank Jackson and Dan Moller.

⁵¹ This question is similar to one many of us may face in our future (or, arguably, face now): what should you do knowing that, in some specified amount of time, you will surely die? And, of course, we should not be too confident that the question from my youth may not yet again become relevant.

⁵² This objection echoes a remark of C. S. Lewis to the effect that if one is about to be swept over a waterfall one does not have to sing praises to the river gods.

utilitarianism, or of how utilitarianism holds our 'ground projects' (and therefore our integrity) hostage to circumstances beyond our control.⁵³

It is not my task here to defend utilitarianism as anything more than a plausible research program. However, it is surely old news that utilitarianism can require us to break familiar patterns of behavior that are dear to our hearts when doing so would realize what is best. Of course this would be difficult to do, and most of us, most of the time, would not succeed in doing what is right. (No one said that it was easy to be a utilitarian.) But our failures to do what is right would not count against doing what is best as a moral ideal, anymore than the human proclivity for violence should lead us to give up on peace as a cherished moral value. Or so it seems at first glance.

However, the most important point is this. My present concern is not with alternative realities or possible worlds; it is facts about this world that are relevant for present purposes. I am concerned with how a utilitarian agent should respond to the problem of global environmental change that we actually face here and now. Global environmental change is not like the case of an impending interplanetary collision that is entirely beyond our control. Nor is it an 'all or nothing' phenomenon. Collectively, we can prevent or mitigate various aspects of global environmental change, and an individual agent can affect collective behavior in several ways. One's behavior in producing and consuming is important for its immediate environmental impacts, and also for the example-setting and role-modeling dimensions of the behavior.⁵⁴ It is a fact of life that one may never know how one's long-term projects will fare, or even how successful one has been in motivating and enlisting other people to pursue them, but this is as much grounds for optimism as pessimism. Nor does an environmentally friendly lifestyle have to be a miserable one.⁵⁵ Even if in the end one's values do not prevail, there is comfort and satisfaction in living in accordance with one's ideals.⁵⁶

⁵³ This latter objection to utilitarianism was a constant theme in the work of Bernard Williams and has stimulated an enormous literature. To begin at the beginning with the famous case of Jim and the Indians, see his 'A Critique of Utilitarianism', in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge, 1973). For an unusually insightful discussion of the 'demandingness' objection see Murphy, *Moral Demands*, chs. 2–3.

⁵⁴ See Ziva Kunda, *Social Cognition: Making Sense of People* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 501–6.

⁵⁵ Contrary to what one might think reading the newspapers, relationships between subjective reports of well-being and economic measures (such as per capita GDP) are equivocal and complex. An easy way into these issues is through the home page of Ed Diener, one of the leading researchers in the study of subjective well-being (<http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~ediener/>).

⁵⁶ One way of developing this thought in a decision-theoretic context would be to follow Alexander Schuessler (in his *A Logic of Expressive Choice* (Princeton, 2000)) in distinguishing the 'expressive' from the 'outcome' value of a choice. This distinction may

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists 180

All of this taken together suggests that real utilitarian agents here and now should try to prevent or mitigate global environmental change rather than celebrate its arrival.

However, presently there is no algorithm for designing the optimal utilitarian agent.⁵⁷ Nor is there an algorithm for constructing the perfect constitution, which constrains majority rule when it should, but does not prevent its expression when it should not.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, we have better and worse people and constitutions, and sometimes we know them when we see them. It might be nice to have a calculus that we could apply to constitutions and character, but absent this, we can still go forward living our lives and organizing our societies. These responses may not satisfy those who are concerned with the logic of collective action or who believe that every question must admit of a precise answer. But they should go some way towards satisfying those who like me are concerned with the moral psychology of collective action, and are willing to accept Aristotle's view that deliberation can never be completely divorced from practical wisdom.

20. What I have argued thus far is that despite various conundrums and complexities, in the face of global environmental change, utilitarians should be virtue theorists. While it is not my task here to provide a full account of what virtues utilitarians should try to develop and inculcate, I will conclude with a brief, tentative sketch of what might be called the 'green virtues'.⁵⁹ My goal is not to construct a complete account of the ideal utilitarian moral agent, but only to provide a sample of how we might think about the green virtues that such an agent might exemplify.⁶⁰ There is a modest literature on this

also help explain our intuitions in cases of overdetermined harms (mentioned in n. 50). The deepest general philosophical discussion of these issues that I know is Thomas Hill Jr, 'Symbolic Protest and Calculated Silence', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9 (1979). However, Hill focuses mostly on obviously malevolent acts and practices rather than the apparently 'innocent' ones implicated in global environmental change.

⁵⁷ David Lyons discusses a similar point when he talks about the 'moral opacity' and 'moral ambiguity' of utilitarianism (in 'The Moral Opacity of Utilitarianism', *Morality*, ed. Hooker et al.), though I'm not certain exactly what conclusion he wants to draw from his discussion.

⁵⁸ Jon Elster has extensively discussed the analogy between individual and collective pre-commitment and restraint, most recently in his *Ulysses Unbound* (New York, 2000).

⁵⁹ James Griffin points out (*Value Judgement*, p. 106), that the problem of calculation returns here to haunt us, since in order to identify virtues it appears that we need to be able to determine exactly which character traits are utility-promoting. To some extent this is a problem that will have to be faced by any theory that takes both character and consequences seriously.

⁶⁰ A full account of the ideal utilitarian agent facing our problem would have to find a place for vices as well, as I was reminded by Corliss Swain. Indeed, it is plausible to suppose that vices such as greed would be as important in explaining and motivating behavior as the virtues that I mention here.

181

Dale Jamieson

subject, and a fair amount of experience with, and reflection on, green lifestyles, on which we can build.⁶¹

Abstractly we can say that the green virtues are those that utilitarians should try to exemplify in themselves and elicit in others, given the reality of global environmental change. Practically, it seems clear that green virtues should moralize such behavior as reproduction and consumption. As Alan Durning writes,

When most people see a large automobile and think first of the air pollution it causes rather than the social status it conveys, environmental ethics will have arrived. Likewise, when most people see excess packaging, throwaway products, or a new shopping mall and grow angry because they consider them to be crimes against their grandchildren, consumerism will be on the retreat.⁶²

21. Green virtues fall into three categories: those that reflect existing values; those that draw on existing values but have additional or somewhat different content; and those that reflect new values. I call these three strategies of virtue-identification preservation, rehabilitation and creation. I will discuss each in turn, offering tentative examples of green virtues that might fall into these various categories.

Thomas Hill Jr offers an example of preservation.⁶³ He argues that the widely shared ideal of humility should lead people to a love of nature. Indifference to nature 'is likely to reflect either ignorance, self-importance, or a lack of self-acceptance which we must overcome to have proper humility'.⁶⁴ A person who has proper humility would not destroy redwood forests (for example) even if it appears that utility supports this behavior. If what Hill says is correct, humility is a virtue that ought to be preserved by greens.

Temperance may be a good target for the strategy of rehabilitation. Long regarded as one of the four cardinal virtues, temperance is typically associated with the problem of *akrasia* and the incontinent agent. But temperance also relates more generally to self-restraint and moderation. Temperance could be rehabilitated as a green virtue that emphasizes the importance of reducing consumption.

⁶¹ For a start on the literature of green virtue theory, see Philip Cafero, 'Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics', *Environmental Ethics* 23 (2001); Geoffrey B. Frasz, 'Environmental Virtue Ethics: A New Direction for Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1993); Lisa Newton, *Ethics and Sustainability: Sustainable Development and the Moral Life* (Upper Saddle River, 2003); and Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, 1999).

⁶² Alan Durning, *How Much Is Enough? The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth* (New York, 1992), p. 138.

⁶³ In his 'Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving the Natural Environment', *Reflecting on Nature: Readings in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Lori Gruen and Dale Jamieson (New York, 1994).

⁶⁴ Hill, 'Ideals', p. 108.

When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists

182

A candidate for the strategy of creation is a virtue we might call mindfulness. Much of our environmentally destructive behavior is unthinking, even mechanical. In order to improve our behavior we need to appreciate the consequences of our actions that are remote in time and space. A virtuous green would see herself as taking on the moral weight of production and disposal when she purchases an article of clothing (for example). She makes herself responsible for the cultivation of the cotton, the impacts of the dyeing process, the energy costs of the transport, and so on. Making decisions in this way would be encouraged by the recognition of a morally admirable trait that is rarely exemplified and hardly ever noticed in our society.⁶⁵

Although I have been speaking of individual agents and their virtues, it is easy to see that institutions play important roles in enabling virtue. Many of these roles (e.g. inculcation, encouragement) have been widely discussed in the literature on virtue theory. However, it is also important to recognize that how societies and economies are organized can disable as well as enable the development of various virtues. For example, in a globalized economy without informational transparency, it is extremely difficult for an agent to determine the remote effects of her actions, much less take responsibility for them.⁶⁶ Thus, in such a society, it is difficult to develop the virtue of mindfulness.

22. I close by gathering some conclusions. If what I have said is correct, the contrast typically drawn between utilitarianism and virtue theory is overdrawn. Utilitarianism is a universal emulator: it implies that we should lie, cheat, steal, even appropriate Aristotle, when that is what brings about the best outcomes. In some cases and in some worlds it is best for us to focus as precisely as possible on individual acts. In other cases and worlds it is best for us to be concerned with character traits. Global environmental change leads to concerns about character because the best results will be produced by generally uncoupling my behavior from that of others. Thus, in this case and in this world, utilitarians should be virtue theorists.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cooperativeness would be another important characteristic of agents who could successfully address our problem (as well as collective action problems generally). Surprisingly, this characteristic appears to be neglected by both ancient and modern writers on the virtues (Hume may be an exception). Perhaps a virtue of cooperativeness is a candidate for creation, or perhaps, though not itself a virtue, cooperativeness would be expressed by those who have a particular constellation of virtues. For discussion of the importance of cooperativeness to morality, see Robert A. Hinde, *Why Good is Good: The Sources of Morality* (London, 2002).

⁶⁶ There is a growing literature on this topic. See, for example, David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (West Hartford, 1995).

⁶⁷ Roger Crisp reaches a similar conclusion in 'Utilitarianism and the Life of Virtue', *Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (1992).

183

Dale Jamieson

The central morals of this article are these. Philosophically, we should ask when, not whether, utilitarians should be virtue theorists. Practically, we need to develop a catalog of the green virtues and identify methods for how best to inculcate them. Some may consider this an 'obsession' produced by allegiance to a particular moral theory, but to my mind this is not too much to ask of those who are philosophizing while human beings are bringing about the most profound transformation of Earth to occur in fifty million years.⁶⁸

Dale.Jamieson@NYU.edu

⁶⁸ Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Utilitarianism Reconsidered conference in New Orleans LA; the Department of Philosophy at Edinburgh University; the Sub-faculty of Philosophy at the University of Oxford; the Center for Values and Social Policy at the University of Colorado; the Australasian Association of Philosophy meeting in Sydney; the International Conference on Applied Ethics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong; the Department of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; the Minnesota Monthly Moral Philosophy Meeting; the Philosophy Program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York; and the Department of Philosophy at Yale University. I am deeply grateful for all of the interesting discussion provided by these audiences. I thank especially David Copp, Roger Crisp and James Griffin for helpful comments. The origin of this article goes back many years to a conversation with Barbara Herman about the scope and domain of morality; while nothing I say here will settle the differences between us that were expressed that afternoon, I want to thank her for causing me to think so long and hard about this problem.

Part V
Equity and the Future



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Nuclear Energy and Obligations to the Future

R. and V. Routley

Plumwood Mountain, Braidwood, Australia

The paper considers the morality of nuclear energy development as it concerns future people, especially the creation of highly toxic nuclear wastes requiring long-term storage. On the basis of an example with many parallel moral features it is argued that the imposition of such costs and risks on the future is morally unacceptable. The paper goes on to examine in detail possible ways of escaping this conclusion, especially the escape route of denying that moral obligations of the appropriate type apply to future people. The bulk of the paper comprises discussion of this philosophical issue, including many arguments against assigning obligations to the future drawn both from analyses of obligation and from features of the future such as uncertainty and indeterminacy. A further escape through appeal to moral conflict is also considered, and in particular two conflict arguments, the Poverty and Lights-going-out arguments are briefly discussed. Both these escape routes are rejected and it is concluded that if the same standards of behaviour are applied to the future as to the present, nuclear energy development is morally unacceptable.

I. The Bus Example

Suppose we consider a bus, a bus which we hope is to make a very long journey. This bus, a third world bus, carries both passengers and freight. The bus sets down and picks up many different passengers in the course of its long journey and the drivers change many times, but because of the way the bus line is managed and the poor service on the route it is nearly always full to overcrowded, with passengers hanging off the back, and as in Afghanistan, passengers riding on the roof, and chickens and goats in the freight compartment.

Early in the bus's journey someone consigns on it, to a far distant destination, a package containing a highly toxic and explosive gas. This is packaged in a very thin container, which as the consigner well knows is unlikely to contain the gas for the full distance for which it is consigned, and certainly will not do so if the bus should encounter any trouble, for example if there is a breakdown and the interior of the bus becomes very hot, if the bus should strike a very large bump or pothole of the sort commonly found on some of the bad roads it has to traverse, or if some

134 *R. and V. Routley*

passenger should interfere deliberately or inadvertently with the cargo or perhaps try to steal some of the freight, as also frequently happens. *All* of these things, let us suppose, have happened on some of the bus's previous journeys. If the container should break the resulting disaster would probably kill at least some of the people and animals on the bus, while others could be maimed or contract serious diseases.

There does not seem much doubt about what most of us would say about the morality of the consigner's action, and there is certainly no doubt about what the passengers would say. The consigner's action in putting the safety of the occupants of the bus at risk is appalling. What could excuse such an action, what sort of circumstances might justify it, and what sort of case could the consigner reasonably put up? The consigner might say that it is by no means certain that the gas will escape; he himself is an optimist and therefore feels that such unfavourable possible outcomes should be ignored. In any case the bus might have an accident and the passengers be killed long before the container gets a chance to leak; or the passengers might change to another bus and leave the lethal parcel behind.

He might say that it is the responsibility of the passengers and the driver to ensure that the journey is a smooth one, and that if they fail to do so, the results are not his fault. He might say that the journey is such a long one that many of the passengers may have become mere mindless vegetables or degenerate wretches about whose fate no decent person need concern himself, or that they might not care about losing their lives or health or possessions anyway by that time.

Most of these excuses will seem little more than a bad joke, and certainly would not usually be reckoned any sort of justification. The main argument the consigner of the lethal parcel employs, however, is that his own pressing needs justify his actions. He has no option but to consign his potentially lethal parcel, he says, since the firm he owns, and which has produced the material as a by-product, is in bad financial straits and cannot afford to produce a better container or to stop the production of the gas. If the firm goes out of business, the consigner says, his wife will leave him, and he will lose his family happiness, the comfortable way of life to which he has become accustomed and sees now as a necessity; his employees will lose their jobs and have to look for others; not only will the firm's customers be inconvenienced but he, the consigner, will have to break some business contracts; the inhabitants of the local village through loss of spending and cancellation of the Multiplier Effect will suffer finan-

Obligations to the Future 135

cial hardship, and, worst of all, the tiny flow of droplets that the poor of the village might receive (theoretically at any rate) as a result of the trickling down of these good things would dry up entirely. In short, some basic and some perhaps uncomfortable changes will be needed in the village.

Even if the consigner's story were accepted at face value – and it would be wise to look critically at his story – only someone whose moral sensibilities had been paralysed by the disease of galloping economism could see such a set of considerations, based on 'needs', comfort, and the goal of local prosperity, as justifying the consigner's action.

One is not generally entitled to thus simply *transfer* the risks and costs arising from one's own life onto other uninvolved parties, to get oneself out of a hole of one's own making by creating harm or risk of harm to someone else who has had no share in creating the situation. To create serious risks and costs, especially risks to life or health for such others, simply to avoid having to make some changes to a comfortable life style, or even for a somewhat better reason, is usually thought deserving of moral condemnation, and sometimes considered a crime; for example, the action of a company in creating risks to the lives or health of its workers or customers to prevent itself from going bankrupt. What the consigner says may be an explanation of his behaviour, but it is not a justification.

The problem raised by nuclear waste disposal is by no means a perfect analogy to the bus case, since, for example, the passengers on the nuclear bus cannot get off the bus or easily throw out the lethal package. In many crucial moral respects, however, the nuclear waste storage problem as it affects future people, the passengers in the bus we are considering, resembles the consignment of the faultily packaged lethal gas. Not only are rather similar moral principles involved, but a rather similar set of arguments to the lamentable excuses the consigner presents have been seriously put up to justify nuclear development, the difference being that in the nuclear case these arguments have been widely accepted. There is also some parallel in the risks involved; there is no *known* safe way to package the highly toxic wastes generated by nuclear plants that will be spread around the world if large-scale nuclear development goes ahead.¹ The wastes problem will not be a slight one, with *each one* of the more than 2,000 reactors envisaged by the end of the century, producing on average *annual* wastes containing one thousand times the radioactivity of the Hiroshima bomb.² The wastes include not merely the spent fuels and their radioactive by-products, but also everything they contaminate, from fuel containers to the thousands of widely distributed decommissioned nuclear

136 *R. and V. Routley*

reactors which will have to be abandoned, still in a highly radioactive condition, after the expiry of their expected lifetimes of about thirty years, and which have been estimated to require perhaps one and a half million years to reach safe levels of radioactivity.³ The wastes must be kept suitably isolated from the environment for their entire active lifetime; for fission products the required storage period averages a thousand years or so, and for the actinides (transuranic elements) which include plutonium, there is a half-million to a million-year storage problem.⁴

Serious problems have arisen with both short-term and proposed long-term methods of storage, even with the comparatively small quantities of waste that have been produced over the last twenty years.⁵ With present known short-term surface methods of storage there is a continued need for human intervention to keep the material isolated from the environment, while with proposed longer-term methods such as storage in salt mines or granite to the risk of human interference there are added the risks of leakage, e.g. through water seepage, and of disturbance, for example through climatic change, earth movements, etc. The risks are significant: no reasonable person with even a limited acquaintance with the history of human affairs over the last 3,000 years could be confident of safe storage by methods involving human intervention over the enormous time periods involved. No one with even a slight knowledge of the geological and climatic history of the earth over the last million years, a period which has seen a number of ice ages and great fluctuations in climate for example, could be confident that the waste material could be safely stored for the vast periods of time required. Much of this waste is highly toxic; for example, even a beachball sized quantity of plutonium appropriately distributed is enough to give every person on the planet lung cancer – so that a leak of even a small part of this waste material could involve huge loss of life, widespread disease and genetic damage, and contamination of immense areas of land.⁶

Given the enormous costs which could be involved for the future, it is plainly grossly inadequate to merely speculate concerning untested, but possibly or even probably, safe methods for disposal of wastes. Yet none of the proposed methods has been properly tested, and they may prove to involve all sorts of unforeseen difficulties and risks when an attempt is made to put them into practice on a commercial scale. Only a method that could provide a rigorous guarantee of safety over the storage period, that placed safety beyond reasonable doubt, would be acceptable. It is difficult to see how such rigorous guarantees could be given concerning either the

Obligations to the Future 137

geological or future human factors. But even if an economically viable, rigorously safe long-term storage method *could* be devised, there is the problem of guaranteeing that it would be universally and invariably *used*. The assumption that it would be, especially if, as seems likely, such a method proved expensive economically and politically, seems to presuppose a level of efficiency, perfection, and concern for the future not previously encountered in human affairs, and certainly not conspicuous in the nuclear industry.⁷ Again, unless we assume continuous and faultless guarding of long-term storage sites through perhaps a million years of possible future human activity, weapons-grade radioactive material will be accessible, over much of the million-year storage period, to any party who is in a position to retrieve it.

Our behaviour in creating this nightmare situation for the future is certainly no better than that of the consigner in the bus example. Industrialized countries, in order to get out of a mess of their own making – essentially the creation of economies dependent on an abundance of non-renewable energy in a situation where it is in fact in limited supply – opt for a ‘solution’ which may enable them to avoid the making of uncomfortable changes during the lifetime of those now living, at the expense of passing heavy burdens on to the inhabitants of the earth at a future time – burdens in the shape of costs and risks which, just as in the bus case, may adversely affect the life and health of future people and their opportunity to lead a decent life.⁸

It is sometimes suggested that analogies like the bus example are defective; that morally they are crucially different from the nuclear case, since future people, unlike the passengers in the bus, will benefit directly from nuclear development, which will provide an abundance of energy for the indefinite future. But this is incorrect. Nuclear fission creates wastes which may remain toxic for a million years, but even with the breeder reactor it could be an energy source for perhaps only 150 years. It will do nothing for the energy problems of the people of the distant future whose lives could be seriously affected by the wastes. Thus perhaps 30,000 generations of future people could be forced to bear significant risks, without any corresponding benefits, in order to provide for the extravagant energy use of only five generations.

Nor is the risk of direct harm from the escape or misuse of radioactive materials the only burden the nuclear solution imposes on the future. Because the energy provided by nuclear fission is merely a stop-gap, it seems probable that in due course the same problem, that of making a

138 *R. and V. Routley*

transition to renewable sources of energy, will have to be faced again by a future population which will probably, again as a result of our actions, be very much worse placed to cope with it.⁹ For they may well have to face the change to renewable resources in an over-populated world not only burdened with the legacy of our nuclear wastes, but also in a world in which, if the nuclear proponents' dream of global industrialization is realized, more and more of the global population will have become dependent on high energy consumption and associated technology and heavy resource use, and will have lost or reduced its ability to survive without it. It will, moreover, probably be a world which is largely depleted of non-renewable resources, and in which such renewable resources as forests and soils as remain, resources which will have to form a very important part of the basis of life, are in a run-down condition. Such points tell against the idea that future people must be, if not direct beneficiaries of nuclear fission energy, at least indirect beneficiaries.

The 'solution' then is to buy time for contemporary industrial society at a price which not only creates serious problems for future people but which reduces their ability to cope with those problems. Just as in the bus case, contemporary industrial society proposes to get itself out of a hole of its own making by creating risk of harm, and by transferring costs and risks, to someone else who has had no part in producing the situation and who will obtain no clear benefit. It has clear alternatives to this action. That it does not take them is due essentially to its unwillingness to avoid changing wasteful patterns of consumption and to its desire to protect the interests of those who benefit from them.

If we apply to the nuclear situation the same standards of behaviour and moral principles that we acknowledge (in principle if perhaps often not in fact) in the contemporary world, it will not be easy to avoid the conclusion that the situation involves injustice with respect to future people on a grand scale. It seems to us that there are only two plausible moves that might enable the avoidance of such a conclusion. First, it might be argued that the moral principles and obligations which we acknowledge for the contemporary world and the immediate future do not apply because the recipients of our nuclear parcel are in the non-immediate future. Secondly, an attempt might be made to appeal to overriding circumstances; for to reject the consigner's action in the circumstances outlined is not of course to say that there are *no* circumstances in which such an action might possibly be justifiable, or at least where the case is less clearcut. It is the same with the nuclear case. Just as in the case of the consigner of the

Obligations to the Future 139

package there is a need to consider what these justifying circumstances might be, and whether they apply in the present case. We turn now to the first of these possible escape routes for the proponent of nuclear development, to the philosophical question of our obligations to the future.

II. Obligations to the Distant Future

The area in which these philosophical problems arise is that of the distant (i.e. non-immediate) future, that is, the future with which people alive today will make no direct contact; the immediate future provides comparatively few problems for moral theories. The issues involved, although of far more than academic interest, have not received any great attention in recent philosophical literature, despite the fact that the question of obligations to future people presents tests which a number of ethical theories fail to pass, and also raises a number of questions in political philosophy concerning the adequacy of accepted institutions which leave out of account the interests of future people.

Moral philosophers have predictably differed on the issue. But contrary to the picture painted in a recent, widely read, and influential work discussing it, Passmore's *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, a good many philosophers who have explicitly considered the question have come down in favour of the same consideration being given to the rights and interests of future people as to those of contemporary or immediately future people. Other philosophers have tended to fall into three categories – those who acknowledge obligations to the future but who do not take them seriously or who assign them less weight, those who deny, or who are committed by their general moral position to denying, that there are moral obligations beyond the immediate future, and those like Passmore and Golding who come down, with admirable philosophical caution, on both sides of the issue, but with the weight of the argument favouring the view underlying prevailing economic and political institutions, that there are no moral obligations to the future beyond those to the next generation.

According to the most extreme of these positions against moral obligations to the future, our behaviour with respect to the future is morally unconstrained; there are no moral restrictions on acting or failing to act deriving from the effect of our actions on future people. Of those philosophers who say, or whose views imply, that we don't have obligations to the (non-immediate) future, i.e. those who have opted for the uncon-

140 *R. and V. Routley*

strained position, many have based this view on accounts of moral obligation which are built on relations which presuppose some degree of temporal or spatial contiguity. Thus moral obligation is seen as grounded on or as presupposing various relations which could not hold between people widely separated in time (or sometimes in space). For example, obligation is seen as grounded in relations which are proximate or of short duration and also non-transitive. Among such suggested bases or grounds of moral obligation, or requirements for moral obligation, which would rule out obligations to the non-immediate future are these: First, there are those accounts which require that someone to whom a moral obligation is held be able to claim his rights or entitlement. People in the distant future will not be able to claim rights and entitlements as against us, and of course they can do nothing to enforce any claims they might have for their rights against us. Secondly, there are those accounts which base moral obligations on social or legal convention, for example a convention which would require punishment of offenders or at least some kind of social enforcement. But plainly these and other conventions will not hold invariantly over change in society and amendment of legal conventions and so will not be invariant over time. Also future people have no way of enforcing their interests or punishing offenders, and there could be no guarantee that any contemporary institution would do it for them.

Both the view that moral obligation requires the context of a moral community and the view that it is contractually based appear to rule out the distant future as a field of moral obligation, as they not only require a commonality, or some sort of common basis, which cannot be guaranteed in the case of the distant future, but also a possibility of interchange or reciprocity of action which cannot apply to the future. Where the basis of moral obligation is seen as mutual exchange, the interests of future people must be set aside because they cannot change the past and cannot be parties to any mutual contract. The exclusion of moral obligations to the distant future also follows from those views which attempt to ground moral obligations in non-transitive relations of short duration such as sympathy and love. There are some difficulties also about love and sympathy for (non-existent) people in the far distant future about whose personal qualities and characteristics one must know very little and who may well be committed to a life-style for which one has no sympathy. On the current showing in the case of nuclear energy it would be easy to conclude that contemporary society lacks both love and sympathy for future people; and it would appear to follow from this that contemporary

Obligations to the Future 141

people have no obligations to future people and can harm them as it suits them.

What all these views have in common is a naturalistic picture of obligation as something acquired, either individually or institutionally, something which is conditional on doing something or failing to do something (e.g. participating in the moral community, contracting), or having some characteristic one can fail to have (e.g. love, sympathy, empathy).¹⁰ Because obligation therefore becomes conditional, features usually thought to characterize it, such as universality of application and necessitation (i.e. the binding features), are lost, especially where there is a choice of whether or not to do the thing required to acquire the obligation, and so of whether to acquire it. The criteria for acquisition suggested are such as to exclude people in the distant future.

However, the view that there are no moral constraints with respect to future people, that one is free to act as one likes with respect to them, is a very difficult one to sustain. Consider the example of a scientific group which, for no particular reason other than to test a particular piece of technology, places in orbit a cobalt bomb which is to be set off by a triggering device designed to go off several hundred years from the time of its despatch. No presently living person and none of their immediate descendants would be affected, but the population of the earth in the distant future would be wiped out as a direct and predictable result of the action. The unconstrained position clearly implies that this is an acceptable moral enterprise, that whatever else we might legitimately criticize in the scientists' experiment, perhaps its being unduly expensive or badly designed, we cannot lodge a moral protest about the damage it will do to future people. The unconstrained position also endorses as morally acceptable the following sorts of examples: A firm discovers it can make a handsome profit from mining, processing, and manufacturing a new type of material which, although it causes no problems for present people or their immediate descendants, will over a period of hundreds of years decay into a substance which will cause an enormous epidemic of cancer among the inhabitants of the earth at that time. According to the unconstrained view the firm is free to act in its own interests, without any consideration for the harm it does to future people.

Such counterexamples to the unconstrained view might seem childishly obvious. Yet the unconstrained position concerning the future from which they follow is far from being a straw man; not only have a number of philosophers writing on the issue endorsed this position, but it is the clear

142 *R. and V. Routley*

implication of many currently popular views of the basis of moral obligation, as well as of economic theory. It does not appear, on the other hand, that those who opt for the unconstrained position have considered such examples and endorsed them as morally acceptable, despite their being clearly implied by their position. We suspect that when it is brought out that the unconstrained position admits such counterexamples, that being free to act implies among other things being free to inflict pointless harm, most of those who opted for the unconstrained position would want to assert that it was not what they intended. What those who have put forward the unconstrained position seem to have had in mind in denying moral obligation is rather that future people can look after themselves, that we are not responsible for their lives. The view that the future can take care of itself also seems to assume a future causally independent of the present. But it is not. It is not as if, in cases such as those discussed above and the nuclear case, the future is simply being left alone to take care of itself. Present people are influencing it, and in doing so must acquire many of the same sorts of moral responsibilities as they do in causally affecting the present and immediate future. The thesis seems thus to assume an incorrect model of an independent and unrelated future.

Also, to say that we are not responsible for the lives of future people does not amount to the same as saying that we are free to do as we like with respect to them, that there are no moral constraints on our action involving them. In just the same way, the fact that one does not have, or has not acquired, an obligation to some stranger with whom one has never been involved – that one has no responsibility for his life – does not imply that one is free to do what one likes with respect to him, for example to rob him or to pursue some course of action of advantage to oneself which could seriously harm him.

These difficulties for the unconstrained position arise in part from the failure to make an important distinction between, on the one hand, acquired or assumed obligations towards somebody, for which some act of acquisition or assumption is required as a qualifying condition, and on the other hand moral constraints, which require, for example, that one should not act so as to damage or harm someone, and for which no act of acquisition is required. There is a considerable difference in the level and kind of responsibility involved. In the first case one must do something or be something which one can fail to do or be, e.g. have loves, sympathy, be contracted. In the second case responsibility arises as a result of being a causal agent aware of the consequences or probable consequences of his

Obligations to the Future 14.

action, and thus does not have to be especially acquired or assumed. Thus there is no problem about how the latter class, moral constraints, can apply to the distant future in cases where it may be difficult or impossible for acquisition or assumption conditions to be satisfied. They apply as a result of the ability to produce causal effects on the distant future of a reasonably predictable nature. Thus also moral constraints can apply to what does not (yet) exist, just as actions can cause results that do not (yet) exist. While it may be the case that there would need to be an acquired or assumed obligation in order for it to be claimed that contemporary people must make special sacrifices of an heroic kind for future people, or even to help them especially, only moral constraints are needed in order for us to be constrained from harming them. Thus, to return to the bus example, the consigner cannot argue in justification of his action that he has never assumed or acquired responsibility for the passengers, that he does not know them and therefore has no love or sympathy for them, and that they are not part of his moral community, in short that he has no special obligations to help them. All that one needs to argue in respect of both the bus and the nuclear case is that there are moral constraints against harming, not that there are specially acquired obligations to take responsibility for the lives of the people involved.

The confusion of moral constraints with acquired obligation, and the attempt therewith to view all constraints as acquired and to write off non-acquired constraints, is facilitated through the use of the term 'moral obligation' in philosophy to indicate any type of deontic constraint, while in natural language it is used to indicate something which has to be assumed or acquired. Hence the equation and at least one root of the unconstrained position, that is of the belief that there are no moral constraints concerning the distant future.

The unconstrained view tends to give way, under the weight of counterexamples, to a more qualified, and sometimes ambivalent position. Passmore's position in [1] is a striking example of the second ambivalent position. On the one hand Passmore regularly gives the impression of one championing future people; for example, in the final sentence of [1] he says, concerning men a century hence:

My sole concern is that we should do nothing which will reduce their freedom of thought and action, whether by destroying the natural world which makes that freedom possible or the social tradition which permit and encourage it.

144 R. and V. Routley

Earlier (esp. pp. 84–85) Passmore appears to endorse the principle ‘that we ought not to act so as *certainly* to harm posterity’ and claims (p. 98) that, even where there are uncertainties, ‘these uncertainties do not justify negligence’. Nevertheless, though obligations concerning non-immediate posterity are thus admitted, the main thrust of Passmore’s argument is entirely different, being in favour of the unconstrained position according to which we have no obligations to non-immediate posterity. Thus his conclusion (p. 91):

So whether we approach the problem of obligations to posterity by way of Bentham and Sidgwick, Rawls or Golding, we are led to something like the same conclusion: our obligations are to *immediate* posterity, we ought to try to improve the world so that we shall be able to hand it over to our immediate successors in a better condition, and that is all.¹¹

Passmore’s position is, to all appearances, simply inconsistent. There are two ways one might try to render it consistent, but neither is readily available to Passmore. The first is by taking advantage of the distinction between moral constraints and acquired obligations, but a basis for this distinction is not evident in Passmore’s work and indeed the distinction is antithetical to the analyses of obligation that Passmore tries to synthesize with his own analysis in terms of loves. The second, sceptical, route to consistency is by way of the argument that we shall consider shortly, that there is always gross uncertainty with respect to the distant future, uncertainty which relieves us in practice of any moral constraints regarding the distant future. But though Passmore’s writing strongly suggests this uncertainty argument (especially his sympathetic discussion of the Premier of Queensland’s argument against conservationists [p. 77]), he also rules it out with the claim that uncertainties do not justify negligence.¹²

Many of the accounts of moral obligation that give rise to the unconstrained position are fused in Passmore’s work, again not entirely consistently, since the different accounts exploited do not give uniform results. Thus the primary account of obligation is said to be in terms of loves – though the account is never satisfactorily formulated or developed – and it is suggested that because our loves do not extend into the distant future, neither do our obligations. This sentimental account of obligation will obviously lead to different results from utilitarian accounts of obligation, which however Passmore appeals to in his discussion of wilderness. In yet other places in [1], furthermore, social contract and moral community

Obligations to the Future 145

views are appealed to – see, e.g., the treatment of animals, of preservation, and of duties to nature. In the case of obligations to future people, however, Passmore does try to sketch an argument – what we call the convergence argument – that all the accounts lead in the end to the unconstrained position.

As well as the convergence argument, and various uncertainty arguments to be considered later, Passmore appears to endorse several other arguments in favour of his theme that there are in practice no obligations to the distant future. In particular, he suggests that such obligations would in practice be otiose. Everything that needs to be accounted for can be encompassed through the chain picture of obligation as linking successive generations, under which each generation has obligations, based on loves, only to the succeeding generation. We outline three objections to this chain account. First, it is inadequate to treat constraints concerning the future as if they applied only between generations, as if there were no question of constraints on individuals as opposed to whole generations, since individuals can create causal effects, e.g. harm, on the future in a way which may create *individual* responsibility, and which can't necessarily be sheeted home to an entire generation. Secondly, such chains, since they are non-transitive, cannot yield direct obligations to the distant future. But for this very reason the chain picture cannot be adequate, as examples again show. For the picture is unable to explain several of the cases that have to be dealt with, e.g. the examples already discussed which show that we can have a direct effect on the distant future without affecting the next generation, who may not even be able to influence matters.¹³ Thirdly, improvements for immediate successors may be achieved at the expense of disadvantages to people of the more distant future. Improving the world for immediate successors is quite compatible with, and may even in some circumstances be most easily achieved by, ruining it for less immediate successors. Such cases can hardly be written off as 'never-never land' examples, since many cases of environmental exploitation might be seen as of just this type, e.g. not just the nuclear case but also the exhaustion of non-renewable resources and the long-term depletion of renewable resources such as soils and forests through over-cropping. If then such obvious injustices to future people arising from the favouring or exclusive concern with immediate successors are to be avoided, obligations to the future will have to be seen as in some way fairly distributed over time, and not merely as accruing to particular generations in the way the chain picture suggests.

146 R. and V. Routley

Passmore tries to represent all obligations to the distant future in terms of heroic self-sacrifice, something which cannot of course be morally required. But in view of the distinctions between constraints and acquired obligation and between obligation and supererogation, this is just to misrepresent the position of these obligations. For example, one is no more engaging in heroic self-sacrifice by not forcing future people into an unviable life position or by refraining from causing them direct harm, than one is resorting to heroic self-sacrifice in refraining from beating and robbing some stranger and leaving him to starve.

Passmore's most sustained argument for the unconstrained position is a convergence argument, that different analyses of obligations, including his own, lead to the one conclusion. This style of argument is hardly convincing when there are well-known accounts of obligation which do not lead to the intended conclusion, e.g. deontological accounts such as those of Kant and of modern European schools, and teleological accounts such as those of Moore (in [8]). But such unfavourable positions are either rapidly passed over or ignored in Passmore's historical treatment and narrow selection of historical figures. The style of argument becomes even less persuasive when it is discovered that the accounts of the main authorities appealed to, Bentham, Sidgwick, and Rawls,¹⁴ do not lead, without serious distortion, to the intended conclusion. Indeed Passmore has twisted the historical and textual evidence to suit his case, as we now try to indicate.

Consider Bentham first. Passmore's assumption, for which no textual evidence is cited,¹⁵ is that no Benthamite calculation can take account of a future more extensive than the immediate future (cf. pp. 87–88). The assumption seems to be based simply on the fact that Bentham remarked that 'the value of the pleasure or pain to *each person* to be considered in any estimate will be greater or less in virtue of the following circumstances'. '3. Its *certainty* or *uncertainty*. 4. Its *propinquity* or *remoteness*' ([10], p. 16). But this does nothing to show that future persons are discounted: the certainty and propinquity do not concern *persons*, but the *utilities* of the persons concerned. As regards which persons are concerned in any calculation Bentham is quite explicit, detailing how

to take an exact account . . . of the general tendency of any act. . . . 5. Take an account of the *number* of persons whose interests appear to be concerned; and repeat the above process [summation of values of pleasure and of pain] with respect to each. ([10], p. 16)

Obligations to the Future 147

It follows that Bentham's calculation takes account of everyone (and, in his larger scheme, every sentient creature) whose interests appear to be concerned: if the interests of people in the distant future appear to be concerned – as they are in conservation issues – they are to be included in the calculation. And there is independent evidence¹⁶ that in Bentham's view the principle of utility was not temporally restricted: 'that is useful which, taking *all times* and all persons into consideration, leaves a balance of happiness' ([10], pp. 17–18, our italics). Thus the future cut-off that Passmore has attributed to Bentham is contradicted by Bentham's own account.

The case of Sidgwick is more complex, because there is isolated oscillation in his application of utilitarianism between use of utility and of (something like) expected utility (see [11], pp. 381, 414). Sidgwick's utilitarianism is, in its general characterization, essentially that of Bentham:

the conduct which . . . is objectively right is that which will produce the greatest amount of happiness on the whole; that is, taking into account all those whose happiness is affected by the conduct. ([11], p. 411)

All includes all sentient beings, both existing and to exist, as Sidgwick goes on to explain (p. 414). In particular, in answer to the question 'How far are we to consider the interests of posterity when they seem to conflict with those of existing human beings?' Sidgwick writes ([11], p. 414, our italics):

It seems, however, clear that the time at which a man exists cannot affect the value of his happiness from a universal point of view; and that the interests of posterity must concern a Utilitarian *as much as those of his contemporaries*, except in so far as the effect of his actions on posterity – and even the existence of human beings to be affected – must necessarily be more uncertain.

But Passmore manages, first of all, to give a different sense to what Sidgwick is saying by adjusting the quotation, by omitting the clause we have italicized, which equalizes the degree of concern for present and future persons, and by italicizing the whole *except*-clause, thereby placing much greater emphasis than Sidgwick does on uncertainty. For according to Sidgwick's impartiality principle, 'the mere difference in time is not a

148 R. and V. Routley

reasonable ground for having more regard to the consciousness of one amount than to that of another' ([11], p. 381; see also p. 124). The apparent tension in Sidgwick's theory as to whether uncertainty should be taken into account is readily removed by resort to a modern distinction between values and expected values (i.e. probability weighted values); utilitarian *rightness* is defined as before in terms of the net happiness of all concerned over all time without mention of uncertainty or probabilities, but it is distinguished from *probable rightness* (*given present information*), in the utilitarian sense,¹⁷ which is defined in terms of the expected net happiness of those concerned, using present probabilities. It is the latter notion, of probable rightness, that practical reasoning is commonly concerned with and that decision theory studies; and it is this that Passmore supposes Sidgwick is using ([1], p. 84). But it is evident that the utilitarian determination of probable rightness, like that of rightness, will sometimes take into account the distant future – as Sidgwick's discussion of utilitarian determination of optimum population (immediately following his remark on uncertainty) does. So how does Passmore contrive to reverse matters, to have Sidgwick's position lead to his own unconstrained conclusion? The answer is: By inserting an additional assumption of his own – which Sidgwick would certainly have rejected – that the *uncertainties entitle us to ignore the distant future*. What Passmore has implicitly assumed in his claim ([1], p. 85) that 'utilitarian principles [such as Sidgwick's] are not strong enough' 'to justify the kinds of *sacrifice* some conservationists now call upon us to make' is his own thesis that 'The uncertainty of harms we are hoping to prevent would in general entitle us to ignore them. . .'. From a decision-theory viewpoint this is simply irrational¹⁸ unless the probabilities of damage are approaching zero. We will deal with the essentially sceptical uncertainty arguments on which Passmore's position depends shortly: here it is enough to observe that Sidgwick's position does not lead to anything like that which Passmore attributes to him – *without* uncertainty assumptions which Sidgwick would have rejected (for he thought that future people will certainly have pleasure and suffer pain).

We can also begin to gauge from Passmore's treatment of nineteenth-century utilitarians, such as Bentham and Sidgwick, the extent of the distortion which underlies his more general historical case for the unconstrained position which, so he claims,

represents accurately enough what, over the last two centuries, men have seen as their duty to posterity as a whole. . . . ([1], p. 91)

Obligations to the Future 149

The treatment accorded Rawls is only marginally more satisfactory. Passmore supposes that Rawls's theory of justice leads directly to the unconstrained position ([1], p. 87 and p. 91), whereas Rawls claims ([5], p. 293) that we have obligations to future people just as to present ones. But the situation is more complicated than Rawls's claim would indicate, as we now try to explain in a summary way (more detail is given in the Appendix). For, in order to justify this claim on his theory (with its present time-of-entry interpretation), Rawls has to invoke additional and dubious motivational assumptions; even so the theory which thus results does not yield the intended conclusion, but a conclusion inconsistent with Rawls's claim. However, by changing the time-of-entry interpretation to an omnitemporal one, Rawls's claim does result from the theory so amended. Moreover, the amended theory also yields, by exactly Rawls's argument for a just saving rate, a resource conservation policy, and also a case against nuclear development. Accordingly Passmore's other claims regarding Rawls are mistaken, e.g. that the theory cannot justify a policy of resource conservation. Rawls does not emerge unscathed either. As on the issue of whether his contract is a necessary condition for obligations, so on obligations which the contract yields to the distant future, Rawls is far from consistent. Furthermore, institutions such as qualified market and voting systems are recommended as just though from a future perspective their results are far from that. Rawls, then, does not take obligations to the future with full seriousness.

In sum, it is not true that the theory of Rawls, any more than the theories of the historical figures actually discussed by Passmore, unequivocally supports the unconstrained position.

III. Uncertainty and Indeterminacy Arguments

Although there are grave difficulties for the unconstrained position, qualification leads to a more defensible position. According to the *qualified position* we are not entirely unconstrained with respect to the distant future: there are obligations, but these are not so important as those to the present, and the interests of distant future people cannot weigh very much in the scale against those of the present and immediate future. The interests of future people then, except in unusual cases, count for very much less than the interests of present people. Hence such things as nuclear development and various exploitative activities which benefit present

150 *R. and V. Routley*

people should proceed, even if people of the distant future are disadvantaged by them.

The qualified position appears to be widely held and is implicit in most modern economic theories, where the position of a decrease in weight of future costs and benefits (and so of future interests) is obtained by application over time of an (opportunity cost) discount rate. The attempt to apply economics as a moral theory, something that is becoming increasingly common, can lead then to the qualified position. What is objectionable in such an approach is that economics must operate within the bounds of moral (deontic) constraints, just as in practice it operates within legal constraints, and cannot determine what those constraints are. There are, moreover, alternative economic theories and simply to adopt one which discounts the future is to beg all the questions at issue. The discounting move often has the same result as the unconstrained position; if, for instance, we consider the cancer example and consider costs as payable compensation, it is evident that, over a sufficiently long period of time, discounting at current prices would lead to the conclusion that there are no recoverable damages and so, in economic terms, no constraints. In short, even certain damage to future people could be written off. One way to achieve the bias against future people is by the application of discount rates which are set in accord with the current economic horizons of no more than about fifteen years,¹⁹ and application of such rates *would* simply beg the question against the interests and rights of future people. Where there is certain future damage of a morally forbidden type the whole method of discounting is simply inapplicable, and its use would violate moral constraints.²⁰

Another argument for the qualified position, which avoids the objections from cases of certain damage, comes from probability considerations. The distant future, it is argued, is much more uncertain than the present and immediate future, so that probabilities are consequently lower, perhaps even approaching or coinciding with zero for any hypothesis concerning the distant future.²¹ But then if we take account of probabilities in the obvious way, by simply multiplying them against costs and benefits, it is evident that the interests of future people, except in cases where there is an unusually high degree of certainty, must count for (very much) less than those of present and neighbouring people where (much) higher probabilities obtain. So in the case of conflict between the present and the future where it is a question of weighing certain benefits to the people of the present and the immediate future against a much lower

Obligations to the Future 151

probability of indeterminate costs to an indeterminate number of distant future people, the issue would normally be decided in favour of the present, assuming that anything like similar costs and benefits were involved. But of course it can't be assumed that anything like similarly weighted costs and benefits are involved in the nuclear case, especially if it is a question of risking poisoning some of the earth for half a million or so years, with consequent risk of serious harm to thousands of generations of future people, in order to obtain quite doubtful or trivial benefits for some present people, in the shape of the opportunity to continue unnecessarily high energy use. And even if the costs and benefits were comparable or evenly weighted, such an argument would be defective, since an analogous argument would show that the consigner's action is acceptable provided the benefit, e.g. the profit he stood to gain from imposing significant risks on other people, was sufficiently large. Such a cost-benefit approach to moral and decision problems, with or without the probability frills, is quite inadequate where different parties are concerned, or for dealing with cases of conflict of interest or moral problems where deontic constraints are involved, and commonly yields counterintuitive results. For example, it would follow on such principles that it is *permissible* for a firm to injure, or very likely injure, some innocent party provided the firm stands to make a sufficiently large gain from it. But the costs and benefits involved are not transferable in any simple or general way from one party to another. Transfers of this kind, of costs and benefits involving different parties, commonly raise moral issues – e.g. is *x* entitled to benefit himself by imposing costs on *y*? – which are not susceptible to a simple cost-benefit approach of the sort adopted by some proponents of nuclear energy, who attempt to dismiss the costs to future people with the soothing remark that any development involves costs as well as benefits. The transfer point is enough to invalidate the comparison, heavily relied on by McCracken [16] in building a case for the acceptability of the nuclear risk, between nuclear risks and those from cigarette smoking. In the latter case those who supposedly benefit from the activity are also, to an overwhelming extent, those who bear the serious health costs and risks involved. In contrast the users and supposed beneficiaries of nuclear energy will be risking not only, or even primarily, their own lives and health, but also those of others who may be non-beneficiaries and who may be spatially or temporally removed, and these risks will not be in any direct way related to a person's extent of use.

The transfer objection is essentially the same as that to the utilitarian's

152 R. and V. Routley

happiness sums as a way of solving moral conflict between different parties, and the introduction of probability considerations does not change the principles involved but merely complicates analyses. One might further object to the probability argument that probabilities involving distant future situations are not always less than those concerning the immediate future in the way the argument supposes, and that the outcomes of some moral problems such as the bus example do not depend on a high level of probability anyway. In some sorts of cases it is enough, as the bus example reveals, that a significant risk is created; such cases do not depend critically on high probability assignments.

Uncertainty arguments in various forms are the most common and important ones used by philosophers and others to argue for the position that we cannot be expected to take serious account of the effects of our actions on the distant future. There are two strands to the uncertainty argument, capable of separation, but frequently entangled. Both arguments are mistaken, the first on *a priori* grounds, the second on *a posteriori* grounds. The first argument is a generalized uncertainty argument which runs as follows: In contrast to the exact information we can obtain about the present, the information we can obtain about the effects of our actions on the distant future is unreliable, woolly, and highly speculative. But we cannot base assessments of how we should act on information of this kind, especially when accurate information is obtainable about the present which would indicate different action. Therefore we must regretfully ignore the uncertain effects of our actions on the distant future. More formally and crudely: One only has obligations to the future if these obligations are based on reliable information; there is no reliable information at present as regards the distant future; therefore one has no obligations to the distant future.

The first argument is essentially a variation on a sceptical argument in epistemology concerning our knowledge of the future (formally, replace 'obligations' by 'knowledge' in the crude statement of the argument above). The main ploy is to considerably overestimate and overstate the degree of certainty available with respect to the present and immediate future, and the degree of certainty which is required as the basis for moral consideration both with respect to the present and with respect to the future. Associated with this is the attempt to suggest a sharp division as regards certainty between the present and immediate future on the one hand and the distant future on the other. We shall not find, we suggest, that there is any such sharp or simple division between the distant future and

Obligations to the Future 153

the adjacent future and present, at least with respect to those things in the present which are normally subject to moral constraints. We can and constantly do act on the basis of such 'unreliable' information as the sceptic as regards the future conveniently labels 'uncertainty'; for sceptic-proof certainty is rarely, or never, available with respect to much of the present and immediate future. In moral situations in the present, action often takes account of risk and probability, even quite low probabilities. A good example is again the bus case. We do not need to know for certain that the container will break and the lethal gas escape. In fact it does not even have to be probable, in the relevant sense of more probable than not, in order for us to condemn the consigner's action. It is enough that there is a significant risk of harm in this sort of case. It does not matter if the decreased well-being of the consigner is certain and the prospects of the passengers quite uncertain; the resolution of the problem is still clearly in favour of the so-called 'speculative' and 'unreliable'. But if we do not require certainty of action to apply moral constraints in contemporary affairs, why should we require a much higher standard of certainty in the future? Why should we require epistemic standards for the future which the more familiar sphere of moral action concerning the present and adjacent future does not need to meet? The insistence on certainty as a necessary condition before moral consideration can be given to the distant future, then, amounts to an epistemic double standard. But such an epistemic double standard, proposed in explaining the difference between the present and the future and to justify ignoring future peoples' interests, in fact cannot itself provide an explanation of the differences, since it already presupposes different standards of certainty appropriate to each class, which difference is in turn in need of justification.

The second uncertainty argument is a practical uncertainty argument, that whatever our *theoretical* obligations to the future, we cannot in practice take the interests of future people into account, because uncertainty about the distant future is so gross that we cannot determine what the likely consequences of actions upon it will be and therefore, however good our intentions to the people of the distant future, in practice we have no choice but to ignore their interests. Uncertainty is *gross* where certain incompatible hypotheses are as good as one another and there is no rational ground for choosing between them. The second uncertainty argument can also be put in this way: If moral principles are, like other principles, implicational in form, that is of such forms as 'if x has character h then x is wrong, for every (action) x ', then what the argument claims is

154 *R. and V. Routley*

that we can never obtain the information about future actions which would enable us to detach the antecedent of the implication. So even if moral principles theoretically apply to future people, in practice they cannot be applied to obtain clear conclusions or directions concerning contemporary action of the 'It is wrong to do x ' type.

Many of the assumptions of the second argument have to be conceded. If the distant future really is so grossly uncertain that in every case it is impossible to determine in any way that is better than chance what the effects of present action will be, and whether any given action will help or hinder future people, then moral principles, although they may apply theoretically to the future, will not be applicable in practice for obtaining any clear conclusions about how to act. Hence the distant future will impose no practical moral constraints on action. However, the argument is factually incorrect in assuming that the future is always so grossly uncertain or indeterminate. Admittedly there is often a high degree of uncertainty concerning the distant future, but as a matter of (contingent) fact it is not always so gross or sweeping as the argument has to assume. There are some areas where uncertainty is not so great as to exclude constraints on action, especially when account is taken of the point, noticed in connection with the first argument, that complete certainty is commonly not required for moral constraints and that all that may be needed in some cases is the creation of a significant risk. Again there is considerable uncertainty about many factors which are not highly, or at all, morally relevant, but this does not extend to many factors which are of much greater importance to moral issues. For example, we may not have any idea what the fashions will be in a hundred years in girls' names or men's footwear, or what brands of ice cream people will be eating if any, but we do have excellent reason to believe, especially if we consider 3,000 years of history, that what people there are in a hundred years are likely to have material and psychic needs not entirely unlike our own, that they will need a healthy biosphere for a good life; that like us they will not be immune to radiation; that their welfare will not be enhanced by a high incidence of cancer or genetic defects, by the destruction of resources, or the elimination from the face of the earth of that wonderful variety of non-human life which at present makes it such a rich and interesting place. For this sort of reason, the second uncertainty argument should be rejected. While it is true that there are many areas in which the morally relevant information needed is uncertain or unavailable, and in which we cannot therefore determine satisfactorily how to act, there are certainly others in

Obligations to the Future 155

which uncertainty in morally relevant areas is not so great as to preclude moral constraints on action, where we ascertain if not absolute certainties at least probabilities of the same sort of order as are considered sufficient for the application of moral principles in parallel contemporary cases, especially where spatially remote people are involved. The case of nuclear waste storage, and of uncertainty of the effects of it on future people, seems to be of the latter sort. Here there is no *gross* indeterminacy or uncertainty; it is simply not true that incompatible hypotheses about what may happen are as good as each other. It is plain that nuclear waste storage does impose significant risks of harm on future people, and, as we can see from the bus example, the significant risk of harm is enough in cases of this type to make moral constraints applicable.

In terms of the defects of the preceding uncertainty arguments, we can see the corresponding defects in a number of widely employed uncertainty arguments used to write off probable harm to future people as outside the scope of proper consideration. Most of these popular moves employ both of the uncertainty arguments as suits the case, switching from one to the other in a way that is again reminiscent of sceptical moves. For example, we may be told that we cannot really take account of future people because we cannot be sure that they will exist or that their tastes and wants will not be completely different from our own, to the point where they will not suffer from our exhaustion of resources or from the things that would affect us (cf. Passmore [1]). But this is to insist upon complete certainty of a sort beyond what is required for the present and immediate future, where there is also commonly no guarantee that some disaster will not overtake those we are morally committed to. Again we may be told that there is no guarantee that future people will be worthy of any efforts on our part, because they may be morons or forever plugged into enjoyment- or other machines (Golding [12]). Even if one is prepared to accept the elitist approach presupposed – according to which only those who meet certain properly civilized or intellectual standards are eligible for moral consideration – what we are being handed in such arguments as a serious defeating consideration is again a mere outside possibility – like the sceptic who says that the solid-looking desk in front of us is perhaps only a façade, not because he has any particular reason for doing so, but because he hasn't looked around the back, drilled holes in it, etc. Neither the contemporary nor the historical situation gives any positive reason for supposing that a lapse into universal morosity or universal pleasure-machine escapism is a serious possibility, as opposed to a logical possibility. We can contrast

156 *R. and V. Routley*

with these mere logical possibilities the very real historically supportable risks of escape of nuclear waste or decline of a civilization through destruction of its resource base.

The possibilities just considered in these uncertainty arguments of sceptical character are not real possibilities. Another argument which may consider a real possibility, but still does not succeed in showing that it is acceptable to proceed with an action which would appear to be harmful to future people, is often introduced in the nuclear waste case. This is the argument that future people may discover a rigorously safe and permanent storage method for nuclear wastes before they are damaged by escaped waste material. Let us grant for the sake of the argument that this is a real possibility (though physical arguments may show that it is not). This still does not affect the fact that there is a significant risk of serious damage and that the creation of a significant risk is enough to rule out an action of this type as morally impermissible. In just the same way, future people may discover a cure for cancer, and the fact that this appears to be a real and not merely a logical possibility, does not make the action of the firm in the example discussed above, of producing a substance likely to cause cancer in future people, morally admissible. The fact that there was a real possibility of future people avoiding the harm would show that actions of these sorts were admissible only if what was required for inadmissibility was certainty of harm or a very high probability of it. In such cases, before such actions could be considered admissible, what would be required is far more than a possibility, real or not²² – it is at least the availability of an applicable, safe, and rigorously tested, not merely speculative, technique for achieving it, something that future people could reasonably be expected to apply to protect themselves.

The strategy of most of these uncertainty arguments is fairly clear then, and may be brought out by looking yet again at the bus example, where the consigner says that he cannot be expected to take account of the effect of his actions on the passengers because they may find an effective way to deal with his parcel or some lucky or unlucky accident may occur, e.g. the bus may break down and they may all change to a different bus leaving the parcel behind, or the bus may crash, killing all the passengers before the container gets a chance to leak. These are all possibilities of course, but there is no positive reason to believe that they are any more than that, that is they are not real possibilities. The strategy is to stress such outside possibilities in order to create the false impression that there is gross uncertainty about the future, that the real possibility that the container will

Obligations to the Future 157

break should be treated in the same way as these mere logical possibilities, that uncertainty about the future is so great as to preclude the consigners' taking account of the passengers' welfare and of the real possibility of harm from his parcel, and thereby excuse his action. A related strategy is to stress a real possibility, such as finding a cure for cancer, and thereby imply that this removes the case for applying moral constraints. This move implicitly makes the assumptions of the first argument, that certainty, or at least a very high probability, of harm is required before an action can be judged morally inadmissible, and the point of stressing the real possibility of avoidance of damage is to show that this allegedly required high degree of certainty or probability cannot be attained. That is, the strategy draws attention to some real uncertainty implying that this is sufficient to defeat the application of moral constraints. But, as we have seen, this is often not so.

An argument closely related to the uncertainty arguments is based on the non-existence and indeterminacy of the future.²³ An item is indeterminate in a given respect if its properties in that respect are, as a matter of logic, not settled (nor are they settleable in a non-arbitrary fashion). The respects in which future items are indeterminate are well enough known for a few examples to serve as reminders: all the following are indeterminate: the population of Australia at 2001, its distribution, its age structure, the preferences of its members for folk music, wilderness, etc., the size and shape of Wollongong, the average number of rooms in its houses and in its office blocks, and so on. Philosophical discussion of such indeterminacy is as old as Aristotle's sea battle and as modern as truth-value gaps and fuzzy logics, and many positions have been adopted on the existence and determinacy of future items. Nevertheless theories that there are obligations to the future are not sensitive to the metaphysical position adopted concerning the existence or non-existence of the future. Any theory which denied obligations to the future on the metaphysical grounds that the future did not exist, and did not have properties, so that the present could not be related to it, would be committed to denying such obvious facts as that the present could causally influence the future, that present people could be great-grandparents of purely future people, and so on, and hence would have to be rejected on independent grounds. This is not to say that there are not important problems about the existence or non-existence of future items, problems which are perhaps most straightforwardly handled by a Meinongian position which allows that items which do not exist may have properties. The non-existence of the future

158 *R. and V. Routley*

does raise problems for standard theories which buy the Ontological Assumption (the thesis that what does not exist does not have properties), especially given the natural (and correct) inclination to say that the future does not (now) exist; but such theories can adopt various strategies for coping with these problems (e.g. the adoption of a platonistic position according to which the future does now exist, or the allowance for certain sorts of relations between existents at different times), although the satisfactoriness of these strategies is open to question (cf. [4]). Thus whether or not the Ontological Assumption is assumed and however it is applied, it will be allowed that future items *will* have properties even if they do not have them now, and that is enough to provide the basis for moral concern about the future. Thus the thesis of obligations to the future does not presuppose any special metaphysical position on the existence of the future.

If the non-existence of future items creates no special problems for obligations to the future, the same is not true of their indeterminacy. Whether the indeterminacy of future items is seen as a logical feature of the future which results from the non-existence of purely future items or whether one adopts a (mistaken) platonistic view of the future as existing and sees the indeterminacy as an epistemological one resulting from our inability to know the character of these entities – that is, we cannot completely know the future though it exists and has a definite character – whichever view we take indeterminacy still creates major difficulties for certain ethical theories and their treatment of the future.

The difficulties arise for theories which appear to require a high level of determinacy with respect to the number and character of future items, in particular calculus-type theories such as utilitarianism in its usual forms, where the calculations are critically dependent on such information as numbers, totals, and averages, information which so far as the future is concerned is generally indeterminate. The fact that this numerical information is typically indeterminate means that insofar as head-count utilitarianism requires determinate information on numbers, it is in a similar position to theories discussed earlier; it may apply theoretically to future people, but since the calculations cannot be applied to them their interests will be left out of account. And, in fact, utilitarianism for the most part does not, and perhaps cannot, take future creatures and their interests seriously; there is little discussion as to how the difficulties or impossibility of calculations regarding the open future are to be obtained. Non-platonistic utilitarianism is in logical difficulty on this matter, while platonis-

Obligations to the Future 159

tic utilitarianism – which faces a range of other objections – is inapplicable because of epistemic indeterminacy. We have yet another case of a theory of the sort that applies theoretically but in practice doesn't take the future seriously. But far from this showing that future people's interests should be left out of account, what these considerations show are deficiencies in these sorts of theories, which require excessive determinacy of information. This kind of information is commonly equally unavailable for the accepted areas of moral constraint, the present and immediate future; and the resolution of moral issues is often not heavily dependent on knowledge of such specific determinate features as numbers or other determinate features. For example, we do not need to know how many people there will be on the bus, how intelligent they are, what their preferences are or how badly they will be injured, in order to reach the conclusion that the consigner's action in despatching his parcel is a bad one. Furthermore, it is only the ability of moral considerations to continue to apply in the absence of determinate information about such things as numbers that makes it possible to take account of the possible effects of action, as the risks associated with action – something which is quite essential even for the present if moral considerations are to apply in the normal and accepted way. For it is essential in order to apply moral considerations in the accepted way that we consider alternative worlds, in order to take account of options, risks, and alternative outcomes; but these alternative or counterfactual worlds are not in so different a position from the future with respect to determinacy; for example, there is indeterminacy with respect to the number of people who may be harmed in the bus case or in a *possible* nuclear reactor melt-down. These alternative worlds, like the distant future, are indeterminate in some respects, but not totally indeterminate.

It might still be thought that the indeterminacy of the future, for example with respect to number and exact character, would at least prevent the interest of future people being taken into account where there is a conflict with the present. Since their numbers are indeterminate and their interests unknown, how can we weigh their competing claims against those of the present and immediate future where this information is available in a more or less accurate form? The question is raised particularly by problems of sharing fixed quantities of resources among present and future people, when the numbers of the latter are indeterminate. Such problems are indeed difficult, but they are not resolved by *ignoring* the claims of the future, any more than the problems raised by the need to take account in decision-making of factors difficult to quantify are resolved by ignoring

160 *R. and V. Routley*

such factors. Nor are such distributional problems as large and representative a class of moral problems concerning the future as the tendency to focus on them would suggest. It should be conceded then that there will be cases where the indeterminacy of aspects of the future will make conflicts very difficult or indeed impossible to resolve – a realistic ethical theory will not deliver a decision procedure – but there will equally be other conflict cases where the level of indeterminacy does not hinder resolution of the issue, e.g. the bus example which is a conflict case of a type. In particular, there will be many cases which are not solved by weighing numbers, numbers of interests, or whatever, cases for which one needs to know only the most general probable characteristics of future people. Moreover, even where numbers are relevant often only bounds will be required, exact numerical counts only being required where, for instance, margins are narrow; e.g. issues may be resolved as in parliament where a detailed vote (or division) is only required when the issue is close. It is certainly not necessary then to have complete determinacy to resolve all cases of conflict.

The question we must ask then is what features of future people could disqualify them from moral consideration or reduce their claims to it to below those of present people? The answer is: in principle None. *Prima facie* moral principles are universalizable, and lawlike, in that they apply independently of position in space or in time, for example.²⁴ But universalizability of principles is an outcome of those ethical theories which are capable of dealing satisfactorily with the present; in other words, a theory that did not allow properly for the future would be found to have defects as regards the present, to deal unjustly or unfairly with some present people, e.g. those remotely located, those outside some select subgroup such as (white-skinned) humans, etc. The only candidates for characteristics that would fairly rule out future people are the logical features we have been looking at, uncertainty and indeterminacy; what we have argued is that it would be far too sweeping to see these features as affecting the moral claims of future people in a general way. These special features only affect certain sorts of cases (e.g. the determination of best probable or practical course of action given only present information). In particular they do not affect cases of the sort being considered, the nuclear one, where highly determinate or certain information about the numbers and characteristics of the class likely to be harmed or certainty of damage are not required.

To establish obligations to the future a full universalizability principle is not needed: it is enough to require that the temporal position of a person

Obligations to the Future 161

cannot affect his entitlement to just and fair treatment, to full moral consideration;²⁵ inversely that it is without basis to discriminate morally against a person in virtue of his temporal position. As a result of this universalizability, *there is the same obligation to future people as to the present*; and thus there is the same obligation to take account of them and their interests in what we do, to be careful in our actions, to take account of the probability (and not just the certainty) of our actions' causing harm or damage, and to see, other things being equal, that we do not act so as to rob future people of what is necessary for the chance of a good life. Uncertainty and indeterminacy do not free us of these obligations. If, in a closely comparable case concerning the present, the creation of a significant risk is enough to rule out an action as immoral, and there are no independent grounds for requiring greater certainty of harm in the future case under consideration, then futurity alone will not provide adequate grounds for proceeding with the action, thus discriminating against future people. Accordingly we cannot escape, through appeal to futurity, the conclusion tentatively reached in our first section, that proposals for nuclear development in the present state of technology for future waste disposal are immoral.

IV. Overriding Consideration Arguments

In the first part we noticed that the consigner's action could not be justified by purely economic arguments, such as that his profits would rise, the firm or the village would be more prosperous, or by appealing to the fact that some possibly uncomfortable changes would otherwise be needed. We also observed that the principle on which this assessment was based, that one was not usually entitled to create a serious risk to others for these sorts of reasons, applied more generally and, in particular, applied to the nuclear case. For this reason the economic arguments which are thus most commonly advanced to promote nuclear development – e.g. cheapness, efficiency, profitability for electricity utilities, and the need otherwise for uncomfortable changes such as restructuring of employment, investment, and consumption – do not even *begin* to show that the nuclear alternative is an acceptable one. Even if these economic assumptions about benefits to present people were correct (and there is reason to doubt that most of them are),²⁶ the arguments would fail because economics must operate within the framework of moral constraints, and not vice versa.

162 R. and V. Routley

What one does have to consider, however, are moral conflict arguments, that is arguments to the effect that, unless the prima facie unacceptable alternative is taken, some even more unacceptable alternative is the only possible outcome, and will ensue. For example, in the bus case, the consigner may argue that his action is justified because unless it is taken the village will starve. It is by no means clear that even such a justification as this would be sufficient, especially where the risk to the passengers is high, as the case seems to become one of transfer of costs and risks onto others; but such a moral situation would no longer be so clearcut, and one would perhaps hesitate to condemn any action taken in such circumstances.

Some of the arguments advanced to show moral conflict are based on competing duties to present people, and others on competing obligations to future people, both of which are taken to override the obligations not to impose on the future significant risk of serious harm. The structure of such moral conflict arguments is based crucially on the presentation of a genuine and exhaustive set of alternatives (or at least practical alternatives), and upon showing that the only alternatives to admittedly morally undesirable actions are even more undesirable ones. If some practical alternative which is not morally worse than the action to be justified is overlooked, suppressed, or neglected in the argument – for example, if in the bus case it turns out that the villagers have another option to starving or to the sending off of the parcel, namely earning a living in some other way – then the argument is defective and cannot readily be patched. We want to argue that suppression of practicable alternatives has occurred in the argument, designed to show that the alternatives to the nuclear option are even worse than the option itself, and that there are other factual defects in these arguments as well. In short, the arguments depend essentially on the presentation of false dichotomies.

The first argument, the *poverty argument*, is that there is an overriding obligation to the poor, both the poor of the third world and the poor of industrialized countries. Failure to develop nuclear energy, it is often claimed, would amount to denying them the opportunity to reach the standard of affluence we currently enjoy and would create unemployment and poverty in the industrialized nations.

The unemployment and poverty argument does not stand up to examination either for the poor of the industrial countries or for those of the third world. There is good evidence that large-scale nuclear energy will help to increase unemployment and poverty in the industrial world, through the

Obligations to the Future 163

diversion of great amounts of available capital into an industry which is not only an exceptionally poor provider of direct employment, but also helps to reduce available jobs through encouraging substitution of energy use for labour use.²⁷ The argument that nuclear energy is needed for the third world is even less convincing. Nuclear energy is both politically and economically inappropriate for the third world, since it requires massive amounts of capital, requires numbers of imported scientists and engineers, and creates negligible employment, while politically it increases foreign dependence, adds to centralized entrenched power and reduces the chance for change in the oppressive political structures which are a large part of the problem.²⁸ The fact that nuclear energy is not in the interests of people of the third world does not, of course, mean that it is not in the interests of, and wanted by, their rulers, the westernized and often military elites in whose interests the economies of these countries are usually organized; but it is not paternalistic to examine critically the demands these ruling elites may make in the name of the poor.

The poverty argument then is a fraud. Nuclear energy will not be used to help the poor.²⁹ Both for the third world and for the industrialized countries there are well-known energy-conserving alternatives and the practical option of developing other energy sources,³⁰ alternatives which are morally acceptable and socially preferable to nuclear development, and which have far better prospects for helping the poor.³¹

The second major argument advanced to show moral conflict appeals to a set of supposedly overriding and competing obligations to future people. We have, it is said, a duty to pass on the immensely valuable things and institutions which our culture has developed. Unless our high-technological, high-energy industrial society is continued and fostered, our valuable institutions and traditions will fall into decay or be swept away. The argument is essentially that without nuclear power, without the continued level of material wealth it alone is assumed to make possible, the lights of our civilization will go out.³²

The *lights-going-out argument* raises rather sharply questions as to what is valuable in our society, and of what characteristics are necessary for a good society. These are questions which deserve much fuller treatment than we can allot them here, but a few brief points should be made.

The argument adopts an extremely uncritical position with respect to existing high-technology societies, apparently assuming that they are uniformly and uniquely valuable; it also assumes that technological society is unmodifiable, that it can't be changed in the direction of energy

164 R. and V. Routley

conservation or alternative energy sources without collapse. Such a society has to be accepted and assessed as a whole, and virtually unlimited supplies of energy are essential to maintain this whole.

These assumptions are hard to accept. The assumption that technological society's energy patterns are unmodifiable is especially so – after all, it has survived events such as world wars which have required major social and technological restructuring and consumption modification. If western society's demands for energy are totally unmodifiable without collapse, not only would it be committed to a programme of increasing destruction, but one might ask what use its culture could be to future people who would very likely, as a consequence of this destruction, lack the resource base which the argument assumes to be essential in the case of contemporary society.

There is also difficulty with the assumption of uniform valuableness; but if this is rejected the question becomes not: what is necessary to maintain *existing* high-technological society and its political institutions? but rather: what is necessary to maintain what is *valuable* in that society and the political institutions which are needed to maintain those valuable things? While it may be easy to argue that high energy consumption is necessary to maintain the political and economic *status quo*, it is not so easy to argue that it is essential to maintain what is *valuable*, and it is what is valuable, presumably, that we have a duty to pass on to the future.

The evidence, e.g. from history, is that no very high level of material affluence or energy consumption is needed to maintain what is valuable. There is good reason in fact to believe that a society with much lower energy and resource consumption would better foster what is valuable than our own. But even if a radical change in these directions is independently desirable, as we believe it is, it is not necessary to presuppose such a change, in the short term at least, in order to see that the assumptions of the lights-going-out argument are wrong. No enormous reduction of well-being is required to consume less energy than at present, and certainly far less than the large increase over present levels of consumption which is assumed in the usual economic case for nuclear energy.³³ What the nuclear strategy is really designed to do then is not to prevent the lights going out in western civilization, but to enable the lights to go on burning all the time – to maintain and even increase the wattage output of the Energy Extravaganza.

In fact there is good reason to think that, far from the high energy consumption society fostering what is valuable, it will, especially if energy

Obligations to the Future 165

is obtained by nuclear-fission means, be positively inimical to it. A society which has become heavily dependent upon an extremely high centralized, controlled, and garrisoned, capital- and expertise-intensive energy source, must be one which is highly susceptible to entrenchment of power, and one in which the forces which control this energy source, whether capitalist or bureaucratic, can exert enormous power over the political system and over people's lives, even more than they do at present. Very persuasive arguments have been advanced by civil liberties groups and others in a number of countries to suggest that such a society would tend to become authoritarian, if only as an outcome of its response to the threat posed by dissident groups in the nuclear situation.³⁴

There are reasons to believe then that with nuclear development what we would be passing on to future generations would be some of the worst aspects of our society (e.g. the consumerism, growing concentration of power, destruction of the natural environment, and latent authoritarianism), while certain valuable aspects would be lost or threatened. Political freedom is a high price to pay for consumerism and energy extravagance.

Again, as in the case of the poverty arguments, clear alternatives which do not involve such unacceptable consequences are available. The alternative to the high technology-nuclear option is not a return to the cave, the loss of all that is valuable, but the development of alternative technologies and life-styles which offer far greater scope for the maintenance and further development of what is valuable in our society than the highly centralized nuclear option.³⁵ The lights-going-out argument, as a moral conflict argument, accordingly fails, because it also is based on a false dichotomy. Thus both the escape routes, the appeal to moral conflict and to the appeal to futurity, are closed.

If then we apply the same standards of morality to the future as we acknowledge for the present – as we have argued we should – the conclusion that the proposal to develop nuclear energy on a large scale is a crime against the future is inevitable, since both the escape routes are closed. There are, of course, also many other grounds for ruling it out as morally unacceptable, for saying that it is not only a crime against the distant future but also a crime against the present and immediate future. These other grounds for moral concern about nuclear energy, as it affects the present and immediate future, include problems arising from the possibility of catastrophic releases of radioactive fuel into the environment or of waste material following an accident such as reactor melt-down, of unscheduled discharges of radiation into the environment from a plant fault, of proli-

166 R. and V. Routley

feration of nuclear weapons, and of deliberate release or threat of release of radioactive materials as a measure of terrorism or of extortion. All these are important issues, of much moral interest. What we want to claim, however, is that on the basis of its effects on the future *alone*, the nuclear option is morally unacceptable.

Appendix

Passmore's Treatment of Rawls, and What Really Happens on Rawls's Theory

Passmore takes it that Rawls's theory yields an unconstrained position but, according to Rawls, the theory leads to quite the opposite result; namely,

persons in different generations [and not merely neighbouring generations] have duties and obligations to one another just as contemporaries do. The present generation cannot do as it pleases but is bound by the principles that would be chosen in the original position to define justice between persons at different moments of time. . . . The derivation of these duties and obligations may seem at first a somewhat far-fetched application of the central doctrine. Nevertheless these requirements would be acknowledged in the original position [where the parties do not know to which generation they belong], and so the conception of justice as fairness covers these matters without any change in its basic idea. ([5], p. 293; the second insert is drawn from p. 287)

Through judicious use of the veil of ignorance and the time of entry of parties to the original contract position, Rawls's contract theory, unlike simpler explicit contract theories, *can* yield definite obligations to distant future people,³⁶ for example, we ought to save at a just rate for future people.

But, as Rawls remarks (p. 284), 'the question of justice between generations . . . subjects any ethical theory to severe if not impossible tests'. It is doubtful that Rawls's theory as formulated passes the tests; for the theory as formulated does not yield the stated conclusion, but a conclusion inconsistent with the thesis that there are the same obligations to future people as to contemporaries. Exactly how these obligations arise from the initial agreement depends critically on the interpretation of the time of

Obligations to the Future 167

entry of the parties into the agreement. Insofar as Rawls insists upon the present-time-of-entry interpretation (p. 139), he has to introduce supplementary motivational assumptions in order to (try to) secure the desired bondings between generations, in particular to ensure that the generation of the original position saves for any later generation, even their immediate successors ([5], p. 140 and p. 292). Rawls falls back on – what is as we have seen inadequate to the task, since it does not exclude one generation damaging another remote generation in a way that bypasses mutually successive generations – ‘ties of sentiment between successive generations’ (p. 292): to this limited extent Passmore has a point, for such a social contract *on its own* (without additional assumptions about the motives of the parties to the agreement) does not furnish obligations even to our immediate successors. This is indicative also of the unsatisfactory instability of Rawls’s theory under changes, its sensitivity to the way the original agreement is set up, to the motivation of parties, their time of entry, what they can know, etc.

To arrive at a more adequate account of obligations to the distant future under Rawls’s theory, let us adopt, to avoid the additional, dubious and unsatisfactory, motivational assumptions Rawls invokes, one of the alternative – and *non*-equivalent – time-of-entry interpretations that Rawls lists (p. 146), that of persons alive at some time in simultaneous agreement. Let us call this, following Rawls’s notation (on p. 140), *interpretation 4b* (it is perhaps unnecessary to assume for 4b any more than 4a that *all* people need be involved: it may be enough given the equivalencizing effect of the veil of ignorance that *some* are, and as with the particular quantifier it is quite unnecessary to be specific about numbers). Then of course the parties, since they are, for all they know, of different generations, will presumably agree on a just savings rate, and also to other just distribution principles, simply on the basis of Rawlsian rationality, i.e. advancing their own interests, without additional motivation assumptions. This more appealing omnitemporal interpretation of time of entry into the agreement, which gives a superior account of obligation to the future consistent with Rawls’s claim, Rawls in some places puts down as less than best (p. 292) but in his most detailed account of the original position simply dismisses (p. 139):

To conceive of the original position [as a gathering of people living at different times] would be to stretch fantasy too far; the conception would cease to be a natural guide to intuition.

168 R. and V. Routley

This we question: it would be a better guide to intuition than a position (like 4a) which brings out intuitively wrong results; it is a more satisfactory guide, for example, to justice between generations than the present-time-of-entry interpretation, which fails conspicuously to allow for the range of *potential* persons (all of whom are supposed to qualify on Rawls's account for just treatment, cf. § 77). Moreover, it stretches fantasy no further than science fiction or than some earlier contract accounts.³⁶ But it does require changes in the way the original position is conceived, and it does generate metaphysical difficulties for orthodox ontological views (though not to the same extent for the Meinongian view we prefer); for, to consider the latter, either time travel is possible or the original hypothetical position is an *impossible* situation, with people who live at different times assembled at the same time. The difficulties – of such an impossible meeting – help to reveal that what Rawls's theory offers is but a colourful representation of obligations in terms of a contract agreed upon at a meeting.

The metaphysical difficulties do not concern merely possible people, because all those involved are sometime-actual people; nor are there really serious difficulties generated by the fact that very many of these people do not exist, i.e. exist now. The more serious difficulties are either those of time travel, e.g. that future parties relocated into the present may be able to interfere with their own history, or, if time travel is ruled out logically or otherwise, that future parties may be advantaged (or disadvantaged) by their knowledge of history and technology, and that accordingly fairness is lost. As there is considerable freedom in how we choose to (re)arrange the original position, we shall suppose that time travel is rejected as a means of entering the original position. For much less than travel is required; some sort of limited communicational network which filters out, for example, all historical data (and all cultural or species dependent material) would suffice; and in any case if time travel were not excluded essentially the present-time-of-entry interpretation would serve, though fairness would again be put in doubt. The filtered communicational hook-up by which the omnitemporal position is engineered still has – if fairness is to be seen to be built into the decision making – to be combined with a reinterpreted veil of ignorance, so that parties do not know where they are located temporally any more than they know who they are characterwise. This implies, among other things, limitations on the parties' knowledge of factual matters, such as available technology and world and local history; for otherwise parties could work out their location, temporal or spatial. For example, if some party knew, as Rawls supposes,

Obligations to the Future 169

the general social facts, then he would presumably be aware of the history of his time and so of where history ends, that is of the date of his generation, his time (his present), and so be aware of his temporal location. These are already problems for Rawls's so-called 'present-time-of-entry interpretation' – it is, rather, a variable-time-of-entry interpretation – given that the parties may be, as Rawls occasionally admits (e.g. p. 287), of any one generation, not necessarily the present: either they really do have to be of the *present* time or they cannot be assumed to know as much as Rawls supposes.³⁷ There is, however, no reason why the veil of ignorance should not be extended so as to avoid this problem; and virtually any extension that solves the problem for the variable-time-of-entry interpretation should serve, so it seems, for the omnitemporal one. We shall assume then that the parties know nothing which discloses their respective locations (i.e. in effect we write in conditions for universalizability of principles decided upon). There are still gaps between the assumptions of the omnitemporal position as roughly sketched and the desired conclusion concerning obligations to the future, but (the matter is beginning to look non-trivially provable given not widely implausible assumptions and) the intuitive arguments are as clear as those in [5], indeed they simply restate arguments to obligations given by Rawls.

Rawls's theory, under interpretation 4b, admits of nice application to the problems of just distribution of material resources and of nuclear power. The just distribution, or rate of usage, of material resources³⁸ over time is an important conservation issue to which Rawls's theory seems to apply, just as readily, and in a similar fashion, to that in which it applies to the issue of a just rate of savings. In fact the argument from the original position for a just rate of saving – whatever its adequacy – can be simply mimicked to yield an argument for just distribution of resources over generations. Thus, for example:

persons in the original position are to ask themselves how much they would be willing to save [i.e. conserve] at each stage of advance on the assumption that all other generations are to save at the same rate [conserve resources to the same extent]. . . . In effect, then, they must choose a just savings principle [resources distribution principle] that assigns an appropriate rate of accumulation to [degree of resource conservation at] each level of advance. ([5], p. 287; our bracketed options give the alternative argument)

170 *R. and V. Routley*

Just as 'they try to piece together a just savings schedule' (p. 289), so they can try to piece together a just resource distribution policy. Just as a case for resource conservation can be made out by appeal to the original position, since it is going to be against the interests of, to the disadvantage of, later parties to find themselves in a resource depleted situation (thus, on Rawlsian assumptions, they will bargain hard for a share of resources), so, interestingly, a case against a rapid programme of nuclear power development can be devised. The basis of a case against large-scale nuclear development is implicit in Rawls's contract theory under interpretation 4b, though naturally the theory is not applied in this sort of way by Rawls. To state the case in its crude but powerful form: people from later generations in the original position are bound to take it as against their interests to simply carry the waste can for energy consumed by an earlier generation. (We have already argued that they will find no convincing overriding considerations that make it worth their while to carry the waste can.) Thus not only has Passmore misrepresented the obligations to the future that Rawls's theory admits; he is also wrong in suggesting (p. 87 and p. 91) that Rawls's theory cannot justify a policy of resource conservation which includes reductions in present consumption.

There is, in this connection, an accumulation of errors in Passmore, some of which spill over to Rawls, which it is worth trying to set out. First, Passmore claims ([1], p. 86; cf. also p. 90) that 'Rawls does not so much mention the saving of natural resources'. In fact the 'husbanding of natural resources' is very briefly considered ([5], p. 271). It is true, however, that Rawls does not reveal any of the considerable power that his theory, properly interpreted, has for natural resource conservation, as implying a just distribution of natural resources over time. Secondly, Passmore attempts ([1], pp. 87 ff.) to represent the calls of conservationists for a reduction in present resource usage and for a more just distribution as a call for heroic self-sacrifices; this is part of his more general attempt to represent every moral constraint with respect to the non-immediate future as a matter of self-sacrifice. 'Rawls's theory', Passmore says (on p. 87), 'leaves no room for heroic sacrifice', and so, he infers, leaves no room for conservation. Not only is the conclusion false, but the premiss also: Rawls's theory allows for supererogation, as Rawls explains ([5], p. 117). But resource conservation is, like refraining from nuclear development, not a question of heroic self-sacrifice; it is in part a question of obligations or duties to the distant future. And Rawls's theory allows not only for obligations as well as supererogation, but also for natural duties. Rawls's

Obligations to the Future 171

contract, unlike the contracts of what is usually meant by a 'contract theory', is by no means exhaustive of the moral sphere:

But even this wider [contract] theory fails to embrace all moral relationships, since it would seem to include only our relations with other persons and to leave out of account how we are to conduct ourselves towards animals and the rest of nature. I do not contend that the contract notion offers a way to approach these questions which are certainly of the first importance; and I shall have to put them aside. (p. 17)

The important class of obligations beyond the scope of the contract theory surely generates obligations between persons which even the wider contract theory likewise cannot explain. The upshot is that such a *contract* account, *even if sufficient* for the determination of obligations, *is not necessary*. To this extent Rawls's theory is not a full social contract theory at all. However, Rawls appears to lose sight of the fact that his contract theory delivers only a sufficient condition when he claims, for example (p. 298), that 'one feature of the contract doctrine is that it places an upper bound on how much a generation can be asked to save for the welfare of later generations'. For greater savings may sometimes be required to meet obligations beyond those that the contract doctrine delivers. In short, Rawls appears to have slipped into assuming, inconsistently, that his contract theory is a necessary condition.

Although Rawls's theory caters for justice between generations and allows the derivation of important obligations to people in the distant future, the full theory is far from consistent on these matters and there are significant respects in which Rawls does not take justice to the future seriously. The most conspicuous symptoms of this are that justice to the future is reduced to a special case, justice between generations, and that the only aspect of justice between generations that Rawls actually considers is a just savings rate; there is, for example, no proper examination of the just distribution of resources among generations, though these resources, Rawls believes, provide the material base of the just institutions that he wants to see maintained. In fact Rawls strongly recommends a system of markets as a just means for the allocation of most goods and services, recognizing their well-known limitations only in the usual perfunctory fashion ([5], pp. 270 ff.). Yet market systems are limited by a narrow time horizon, and are quite ill-equipped to allocate resources in a just fashion

172 R. and V. Routley

over a time span of several generations. Similarly Rawls's endorsement of democratic voting procedures as in many cases a just method of determining procedures depends upon the assumptions that everyone with an interest is represented. But given his own assumptions about obligations to the future and in respect of potential persons this is evidently not the case. Catering in a just fashion for the interests of future people poses serious problems for any method of decision that depends upon people being present to represent their own interests.

Some of the more conservative, indeed reactionary, economic assumptions in Rawls emerge with the assumption that all that is required for justice between generations is a just savings rate, that all we need to pass on to the future are the things that guarantee appropriate savings such as capital, factories, and machines. But the transmission of these things is quite insufficient for justice to the future, and neither necessary nor sufficient as a foundation for a good life for future generations. What is required for justice is the transmission in due measure of what is *valuable*. Rawls has, however, taken value accumulation as capital accumulation, thereby importing one of the grossest economic assumptions, that capital reflects value. But of course the accumulation of capital may conflict with the preservation of what is valuable. It is for this sort of reason (and thus, in essence, because of the introduction of supplementary economic theses which are not part of the pure contract theory) that Rawls's theory is a reactionary one from an environmental point of view; on the theory as presented (i.e. the contract theory plus all the supplementary assumptions) there is no need to preserve such things as wilderness or natural beauty. The savings doctrine supposes that everything of value for transmission to the future is negotiable in the market or tradeable; but then transmission of savings can by no means guarantee that some valuable things, not properly represented in market systems, are not eliminated or not passed on, thereby making future people worse off. It becomes evident in this way, too, how culturally-bound Rawls's idea of ensuring justice to future generations through savings is. It is not just that the idea does not apply, without a complete overhaul, to non-industrial societies such as those of hunter-gatherers; it does not apply to genuinely post-industrial societies either. Consideration of such alternative societies suggests that what is required, in place of capital accumulation, is that we pass on what is necessary for a good life, that we ensure that the basics are fairly distributed over time and not eroded, e.g. that in the case of the forest people that the forest is maintained. The narrowness of Rawls's picture,

Obligations to the Future 173

which makes no due allowance for social or cultural diversity (from the original contractual position on) or for individual diversity arises in part from his underlying and especially narrow socio-economic assumption as to what people want:

What men want is meaningful work in free association with others, these associations regulating their relations to one another within a framework of just basic institutions. ([5], p. 290)

This may be what many Harvard men want; but as a statement of what men want it supplies neither sufficient nor even necessary conditions.³⁹

NOTES

1 Thus according to the Fox Report ([2], p. 110; our italics).

There is at present no generally accepted means by which high level waste can be permanently isolated from the environment and remain safe for very long periods. . . . Permanent disposal of high-level solid wastes in stable geological formations is regarded as the most likely solution, but has *yet to be demonstrated as feasible*. It is *not certain* that such methods and disposal sites will entirely prevent radioactive releases following disturbances caused by natural processes or human activity.

The Fox Report also quoted approvingly ([2], p. 187; our italics) the conclusion of the British (Flowers) Report [6]:

There should be no commitment to a large programme of nuclear fission power until it has been *demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt* that a method exists to ensure the *safe* containment of long-lived, highly radioactive waste for the *indefinite* future.

Although the absence of a satisfactory storage method has been conceded by some leading proponents of nuclear development, e.g. Weinberg ([3], pp. 32–33), it is now disputed by others. In particular, the headline for Cohen [15], which reads ‘A substantial body of evidence indicates that the high level radioactive wastes generated by U.S. nuclear power plants can be stored satisfactorily in deep geological formations’, has suggested to many readers – what it was no doubt intended to suggest – that there is really no problem about the disposal of radioactive wastes after all. Cohen presents, however, no new hard evidence, no evidence not already available to the British and Australian Commissions ([2] and [6]). Moreover the evidence Cohen does outline fails conspicuously to measure up to the standards rightly required by the Flowers and Fox Reports. Does Cohen offer a commercial-scale procedure for waste disposal which can be demonstrated as safe? Far from it:

174 R. and V. Routley

The *detailed* procedures for handling the high-level wastes are not yet *definite*, but present *indications* are that. . . . (Cohen [1], p. 24; our italics)

Does Cohen 'demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt' the long-term safety of burial of wastes, deep underground? Again, far from it:

On the *face of it* such an approach *appears* to be *reasonably* safe. . . . (p. 24; our italics)

Cohen has apparently not realized what is required.

At issue here are not so much scientific or empirical issues as questions of methodology, of standards of evidence required for claims of safety, and above all, of values, since claims of safety, for example, involve implicit evaluations concerning what counts as an acceptable risk, an admissible cost, etc. In the headline 'a *substantial* body of evidence . . . *indicates* that . . . wastes . . . can be stored *satisfactorily*' the key words (italicized) are evaluative or elastic, and the strategy of Cohen's case is to adopt very low standards for their application. But in view of what is at stake it is hardly acceptable to do this, to dress up in this way what are essentially optimistic assurances and untested speculations about storage, which in any case do little to meet the difficulties and uncertainties that have been widely pointed out as regards precisely the storage proposals Cohen outlines, namely human or natural interference or disturbance.

2 See [18], pp. 24–25.

3 On all these points, see [14], esp. p. 141. According to the Fox Report ([2], p. 110):

Parts of the reactor structure will be highly radioactive and their disposal could be very difficult. There is at present no experience of dismantling a full size reactor.

4 See, in particular, The Union of Concerned Scientists, *The Nuclear Fuel Cycle*, Friends of the Earth Energy Paper, San Francisco 1973, p. 47; also [3], p. 32 and [14], p. 149.

5 As the discussion in [14], pp. 153–7, explains.

6 Cf. [17], pp. 35–36, [18] and, for much detail, J. R. Goffman and A. R. Tamplin, *Poisoned Power*, Rodale Press, Emmau Pa. 1971.

7 On the pollution and waste disposal record of the infant nuclear industry, see [14] and [17].

The record of many countries on pollution control, where in many cases available technologies for reducing or removing pollution are not applied because they are considered too expensive or because they adversely affect the interests of some powerful group, provides clear historical evidence that the problem of nuclear waste disposal would not end simply with the devising of a 'safe' technology for disposal, even if one could be devised which provided a sufficient guarantee of safety and was commercially feasible. The fact that present economic and political arrangements are overwhelmingly weighted in favour of the interests and concerns of (some) contemporary humans makes it not unrealistic to expect the long-term nuclear waste disposal, if it involved any significant cost at all, when public concern about the issue died down, would be seen to conflict with the interests of contemporary groups, and that these latter interests would in many cases be favoured. Nor, as the history of movements such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament shows, could generalized public concern in the absence of direct personal interest, be relied upon to be sustained for long enough to ensure implementation of costly or troublesome long-term disposal methods – even in those places where public concern exists and is a politically significant force.

It must be stressed then that the problem is not merely one of disposal technique. Historical and other evidence points to the conclusion that many of the most important risks associated with nuclear waste disposal are not of the kind which might be amenable

Obligations to the Future 175

to technical solutions in the laboratory. A realistic assessment of potential costs to the future from nuclear development cannot overlook these important non-technical risk factors.

- 8 Of course the effect on people is not the only factor which has to be taken into consideration in arriving at a moral judgment. Nuclear radiation, unlike most ethical theories, does not confine its scope to human life. But since the harm nuclear development is likely to cause to non-human life can hardly *improve* its case, it suffices if the case against it can be made out solely in terms of its effects on human life in the conventional way.
- 9 Proponents of nuclear power often try to give the impression that future people will not just bear costs from nuclear development but will also be beneficiaries, because nuclear power provides an 'abundant' or even 'unlimited' source of energy; thus Weinberg ([3], p. 34): 'an all but infinite source of relatively cheap and clean energy'. A good example of an attempt to create the impression that 'abundant' and 'cheap' energy from nuclear fission will be available to 'our descendants', i.e. all future people, is found in the last paragraph of Cohen [15]. Such claims are most misleading, since fission power even with the breeder reactor has only about the same prospective lifetime as coal-produced electricity (a point that can be derived using data in A. Parker, 'World Energy Resources: A Survey', *Energy Policy*, Vol. 3 [1975], pp. 58–66), and it is quite illegitimate to assume that nuclear fusion, for which there are still major unsolved problems, will have a viable, clean technology by the time fission runs out, or, for that matter, that it ever will. Thus while some few generations of the immediate future may obtain some benefits as well as costs, there is a very substantial chance that those of the more distant future will obtain nothing but costs.
- 10 These feelings, of which Smith's and Hume's sympathy is representative, are but the feeling echoes of obligation. At most, sympathy explains the feeling of obligation or lack of it, and this provides little guide as to whether there is an obligation or not – unless one interprets moral sympathy, the feeling of having an obligation, or being obligated, itself as a sufficient indication of obligation, in which case moral sympathy is a non-explanatory correlate in the feelings department of obligation itself and cannot be truly explanatory of the ground of it; unless, in short, moral sympathy reduces to an emotive rewrite of moral obligation.
- 11 Elsewhere in [1] Passmore is especially exercised that our institutions and intellectual traditions – presumably only the *better* ones – should be passed on to posterity, and that we should strive to make the world a better place, if not eventually an ideal one.
- 12 This is not the only philosophically important issue in environmental ethics on which Passmore is inconsistent. Consider his: 'over-arching intention: to consider whether the solution of ecological problems demands a moral or metaphysical revolution' (p. x); whether the West needs a new ethic and a new metaphysics. Passmore's answer in [1] is an emphatic No.

Only insofar as Western moralists have [made various erroneous suggestions] can the West plausibly be said to need a 'new ethic'. What it needs, for the most part, is not so much a 'new ethic' as adherence to a perfectly familiar ethic.

For the major sources of our ecological disasters – apart from ignorance – are greed and shortsightedness, which amount to much the same thing . . . There is no novelty in the view that greed is evil; no need of a new ethic to tell us as much. (p. 187)

'The view that the West now needs . . . a new concept of nature' is similarly dismissed (p. 186, cf. p. 72). But in his paper [1*] (i.e. 'Attitudes to Nature', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, Vol. 8, Macmillan, London 1975), which is said to be an attempt to bring together and to reformulate some of the basic philosophical themes of [1], Passmore's answer is Yes, and quite different themes, inconsistent with those of [1], are advanced:

176 R. and V. Routley

[T]he general conditions I have laid down . . . have not been satisfied in most of the traditional philosophies of nature. To that degree it is true, I think, that we do need a 'new metaphysics' which is genuinely not anthropocentric. . . . A 'new metaphysics', if it is not to falsify the facts, will have to be naturalistic, but not reductionist. The working out of such a metaphysics is, in my judgement, the most important task which lies ahead of philosophy. ([1*], pp. 260–1)

A new ethic accompanies this new metaphysics.

The emergence of new moral attitudes to nature is bound up, then, with the emergence of a more realistic philosophy of nature. That is the only adequate foundation for effective ecological concern. ([1*], p. 264)

This is a far cry from the theme of [1] that ecological problems can be solved within the traditions of the West.

- 13 Put differently, the causal linkage can bypass intermediate generations, especially given action at a temporal distance: the chain account implies that there are no moral constraints in initiating such causal linkages. The chain picture accordingly seems to presuppose an unsatisfactory Humean model of causation, demanding contiguity and excluding action at a distance.
- 14 Golding we shall concede to Passmore, though even here the case is not clearcut. For Golding writes towards the end of his article ([12], p. 96):

My discussion, until this point, has proceeded on the view that we *have* obligations to future generations. But do we? I am not sure that the question can be answered in the affirmative with any certainty. I shall conclude this note with a very brief discussion of some of the difficulties.

All of Passmore's material on Golding is drawn from this latter and, as Golding says, 'speculative' discussion.

- 15 There is no textual citation for Bentham at all for the chapter of [1] concerned, *viz.* Ch. 4, 'Conservation'.
- 16 As Passmore himself at first concedes ([1], p. 84):

If, as Bentham tells us, in deciding how to act men ought to take account of the effects of their actions on every sentient being, they obviously ought to take account of the pleasure and pains of the as yet unborn.

- 17 Neither rightness nor probable rightness in the hedonistic senses correspond to these notions in the ordinary sense; so at least [13] argues, following much anti-utilitarian literature.
- 18 On this irrationality different theories agree: the rational procedure, for example according to the minimax rule for decision-making under uncertainty, is to minimize that outcome which maximizes harm.
- 19 Discount, or bank, rates in the economists' sense are usually set to follow the market (cf. P. A. Samuelson, *Economics*, 7th ed., McGraw-Hill, New York 1967, p. 351). Thus the rates have little moral relevance.
- 20 Cf. Rawls [5], p. 287: 'From a moral point of view there are no grounds for discounting future well-being on the basis of pure time preference.'
- 21 What the probabilities would be depends on the theory of probability adopted: a Carnapian theory, e.g., would lead back to the unconstrained position.

Obligations to the Future 177

- 22 A real possibility is one which there is evidence for believing could eventuate. A real possibility requires producible evidence for its consideration. The contrast is with mere logical possibility.
- 23 Thus, to take a simple special case, economists dismiss distant future people from their assessments of utility, welfare, etc., on the basis of their non-existence; cf. Ng ('the utility of a non-existent person is zero') and Harsanyi ('only existing people [not even "non-existing potential individuals"] can have *real* utility levels since they are the only ones able to *enjoy* objects with a positive utility, *suffer* from objects with a negative utility, and *feel indifferent* to objects with zero utility') (see Appendix B of Y. K. Ng, 'Preference, Welfare, and Social Welfare', paper presented at the *Colloquium on Preference, Choice and Value Theory*, RSSS, Australian National University, August 1977, pp. 24, 26-27). Non-existent people have no experiences, no preferences; distant future people do not exist; therefore distant future people have no utility assignments – so the sorites goes. But future people at least *will have* wants, preferences, and so on, and these have to be taken into account in adequate utility assessments (which should be assessed over a future time horizon), no matter how much it may complicate or defeat calculations.
- 24 There are problems about formulating universalizability satisfactorily, but they hardly affect the point. The requisite universalizability can in fact be satisfactorily brought out from the semantical analysis of deontic notions such as obligation, and indeed argued for on the basis of such an analysis which is universal in form. The lawlikeness requirement, which can be similarly defended, is essentially that imposed on genuine scientific laws by logical empiricists (e.g. Carnap and Hempel), that such laws should contain no proper names or the like, no reference to specific locations or times.
- 25 Such a principle is explicit both in classical utilitarianism (e.g. Sidgwick [11], p. 414), and in a range of contract and other theories from Kant and Rousseau to Rawls ([5], p. 293). How the principle is *argued for* will depend heavily, however, on the underlying theory; and we do not want to make our use depend heavily on particular ethical theories.
- 26 See esp. R. Lanoue, *Nuclear Plants: The More They Build, The More You Pay*, Center for Study of Responsive Law, Washington DC 1976; also [14], pp. 212 ff.
- 27 On all these points see R. Grossman and G. Daneker, *Guide to Jobs and Energy*, Environmentalists for Full Employment, Washington DC 1977, pp. 1-7, and also the details supplied in substantiating the interesting case of Commoner [7]. On the absorption of available capital by the nuclear industry, see as well [18], p. 23. On the employment issues, see too H. E. Daly in [9], p. 149. A more fundamental challenge to the poverty argument appears in I. Illich, *Energy and Equality*, Calder & Boyars, London 1974, where it is argued that the sort of development nuclear energy represents is exactly the opposite of what the poor need.
- 28 For much more detail on the inappropriateness see E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, Blond & Briggs, London 1973. As to the capital and other requirements, see [2], p. 48, and also [7] and [9].
For an illuminating look at the sort of development high-energy technology will tend to promote in the so-called underdeveloped countries, see the paper of Waiko and other papers in *The Melanesian Environment* (ed. by J. H. Winslow), Australian National University Press, Canberra 1977.
- 29 This fact is implicitly recognized in [2], p. 56.
- 30 A useful survey is given in A. Lovins, *Energy Strategy: The Road Not Taken*, Friends of the Earth Australia, 1977 (reprinted from *Foreign Affairs*, October 1976); see also [17], [6], [7], [14], pp. 233 ff., and Schumacher, *op. cit.*
- 31 This is also explained in [2], p. 56.
- 32 An argument like this is suggested in Passmore [1], Chs. 4 and 7, with respect to the question of saving resources. In Passmore this argument for the overriding importance of passing on contemporary culture is underpinned by what appears to be a future-

178 R. and V. Routley

directed ethical version of the Hidden Hand argument of economics – that, by a coincidence which if correct would indeed be fortunate, the best way to take care of the future (and perhaps even the only way to do so, since do-good intervention is almost certain to go wrong) is to take proper care of the present and immediate future. The argument has all the defects of the related Chain Argument discussed above and others.

- 33 See [14], p. 66, p. 191, and also [7].
- 34 For such arguments see esp. M. Flood and R. Grove-White, *Nuclear Prospects. A Comment on the Individual, the State and Nuclear Power*, Friends of the Earth, Council for the Protection of Rural England and National Council for Civil Liberties, London 1976.
- 35 For a recent sketch of *one* such alternative which is outside the framework of the conventional option of centralized bureaucratic socialism, see E. Callenbach's novel, *Ecotopia*, Banyan Tree Books, Berkeley, California 1975. For the outline of a liberation socialist alternative see *Radical Technology* (ed. by G. Boyle and P. Harper), Undercurrents Limited, London 1976, and references therein.
- 36 Some earlier contract theories also did. Burke's contract (in E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Dent, London 1910, pp. 93–94) 'becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are not yet born'. Thus Burke's contract certainly appears to lead to obligations to distant future generations. Needless to say, there are metaphysical difficulties, which however Burke never considers, about contracts between parties at widely separated temporal locations.
- 37 Several of the preceding points we owe to M. W. Jackson.
- 38 Resources such as soil fertility and petroleum could even be a primary social goods on Rawls's very hazy general account of these goods ([5], pp. 62, 97): are these 'something a rational man wants whatever else he wants'? The primary social goods should presumably be those which are necessary for the good and just life – which will however vary with culture.
- 39 We have benefited from discussion with Ian Hughes and Frank Muller and useful comments on the paper from Brian Martin and Derek Browne.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, Duckworth, London 1974.
- [2] *Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry First Report*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 1977.
- [3] A. M. Weinberg, 'Social Institutions and Nuclear Energy', *Science*, Vol. 177 (July 1972), pp. 27–34.
- [4] R. Routley, 'Exploring Meinong's Jungle II. Existence is Existence Now', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* (to appear).
- [5] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1971.
- [6] *Nuclear Power and the Environment. Sixth Report of the British Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution*, London 1976.
- [7] B. Commoner, *The Poverty of Power*, Knopf, New York 1976.
- [8] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1903.
- [9] B. Commoner, H. Boksenbaum and M. Corr (Eds.), *Energy and Human Welfare – A Critical Analysis*, Vol. III, Macmillan, New York 1975.

Obligations to the Future 179

- [10] J. Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 1, published under the superintendence of J. Bowring, with an intro. by J. H. Burton; William Tait, Edinburgh 1843.
- [11] H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, Macmillan, London 1962 (reissue).
- [12] M. P. Golding, 'Obligations to Future Generations', *Monist*, Vol. 56 (1972), pp. 85–99.
- [13] R. and V. Routley, 'An Expensive Repair Kit for Utilitarianism', presented at the *Colloquium on Preference, Choice and Value Theory*, RSSS, Australian National University, August 1977.
- [14] R. Nader and J. Abbotts, *The Menace of Atomic Energy*, Outback Press, Melbourne 1977.
- [15] B. L. Cohen, 'The Disposal of Radioactive Wastes from Fission Reactors', *Scientific American*, Vol. 236 (June 1977), pp. 22–31.
- [16] S. McCracken, 'The War against the Atom', *Commentary* (September 1977), pp. 33–47.
- [17] A. B. Lovins and J. H. Price, *Non-Nuclear Futures: The Case for an Ethical Energy Strategy*, Friends of the Earth International, San Francisco 1975.
- [18] A. Roberts, 'The Politics of Nuclear Power', *Arena*, No. 41 (1976), pp. 22–47.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Why Care About the Future?

Ernest Partridge

In this section, Professors Heilbroner, Thompson, and Hardin variously pose a question that is central to any discussion of the issue of the duty to posterity. The question is this: Are human beings, for the most part, *capable* of caring for the remote future? Thompson's answer to this question is starkly and uncompromisingly negative, and thus his challenge is the most likely to arouse intuitive discomfort and opposition. But his answer has the merit of reaching to the heart of the problem of whether human beings are the sort of creatures that are capable of caring for their remote posterity.

Professor Thompson's challenge (as well as those of Heilbroner and Hardin) draw their significance from a fundamental criterion of moral responsibility: *stability*. This criterion (examined and defended with considerable care by John Rawls in his monumental work, *A Theory of Justice*), states that no moral principle can claim our allegiance unless human beings are generally capable of obeying the principle, unless, as Rawls puts it, the principle can withstand "the strains of commitment."¹ The criterion, in turn, follows from the metaethical rule that "*ought implies can*." Thompson argues, in effect, that human beings are generally incapable of caring for the remote future and thus are absolved of a moral obligation to do so.

In this paper I will accept Rawls's criterion of stability and will argue, against Thompson, not only that it is *possible* to care about the remote future, but, even more, that failure to do so exacts a considerable cost in well-being to those individuals and those societies that disavow any care for the future.²

There is, I believe, a persuasive empirical case against the claim that human beings are disinclined to care for the future, much less to act upon such cares. We need only consider the present existence of national parks and forests, trust funds, donated public buildings, educational and charitable foundations, and numerous other specific examples of care and provision for "future others."³

A briefer version of this paper appeared in *Alternative Futures*, November 1980.

204 Ernest Partridge

But, while the empirical evidence is abundant, it is not my task to cite such evidence. Instead, through a series of speculations in moral psychology, I wish to suggest not only that humans commonly display a concern for future others but also that it is both morally correct to do so and, even more, that such interest is grounded in identifiable and rational features of human social, personal, and moral life—features that reflect and manifest fundamental aspects of human nature and development. Accordingly, if one feels no concern for the quality of life of his successors, he is not only lacking a moral sense but is also seriously impoverishing his life. He is, that is to say, not only to be *blamed*; he is also to be *pitied*.

The alleged need of a well-functioning person to care for the future beyond his own lifetime rests upon a more basic need that I will call “self transcendence.” In short, then, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that we have sound personal and social, as well as moral, reasons to care about our impact upon the living conditions of both our contemporaries and successor generations.

The Concept of Self Transcendence. By claiming that there is a basic human need for “self transcendence,” I am proposing that, as a result of the psychodevelopmental sources of the self and the fundamental dynamics of social experience, well-functioning human beings identify with, and seek to further, the well-being, preservation, and endurance of communities, locations, causes, artifacts, institutions, ideals, and so on, that are outside themselves and that they hope will flourish beyond their own lifetimes. If this is so, then John Donne spoke for all mankind when he wrote: “No man is an island, entire of itself.” Thus we cannot regard our decisions and the values that we hold to be restricted to and isolated within our lifetimes.

This claim has a reverse side to it, namely, that individuals who lack a sense of self transcendence are acutely impoverished in that they lack significant, fundamental, and widespread capacities and features of human moral and social experience. Such individuals are said to be *alienated*, both from themselves and from their communities. If such individuals lack concern for self-transcending projects and ideals because of a total absorption with themselves, they are said to be *narcissistic* personalities.

“Self-transcendence” describes a class of feelings that give rise to a variety of activities. It is no small ingredient in the production of great works of art and literature, in the choice of careers in public service, education, scientific research, and so forth. In all this variety, however, there is a central, generic motive, namely, for the self to be part of, to favorably effect, and to value for itself the well-being and endurance of something that is *not* oneself.

An awareness of this need for self transcendence might be evoked (among those who have and acknowledge this need) by a simple thought-experiment. Suppose that astronomers were to determine, to the degree of virtual certainty, that in two hundred years the sun would become a nova and extinguish all life and traces of human culture from the face of the earth. In the words of the poet Robinson Jeffers:

. . . These tall
Green trees would become a moment's torches and vanish, the
oceans would explode into steam,
The ships and the great whales fall through them like flaming
meteors into the emptied abysm, the six mile
Hollows of the Pacific sea bed might smoke for a moment
the earth would be like a pale proud moon,
Nothing but vitrified sand and rock would be left on the earth.⁴

Suppose, then, that this were known to be, in two hundred years, the fate of our planet. Would not this knowledge and this awareness profoundly affect the temperament and moral activity of those persons now living who need not fear, for themselves or for anyone they might love or come to love, personal destruction in this eventual final obliteration? How, in fact, is the reader affected by the mere contemplation of this (literal) catastrophe?

For most, I believe, it would be dreadful to contemplate the total annihilation of human life and culture even two hundred years hence. But if, in fact, most persons would be saddened by this thought, we might ask *why* this obliteration is so dreadful to contemplate. We *need* not care personally, and yet we *do* care. We are not indifferent to the fate of future persons unknown and unknowable to us, or to the future career of institutions, species, places, and objects that precede and survive our brief acquaintance thereof. Furthermore, we seem to feel that, if without exorbitant cost we can preserve and enhance natural areas or human artifacts and institutions for the use and enjoyment of future generations, we have a *prima facie* reason to do so.

Apparently, our pride of community, of culture, and of self is enhanced by the assurance that, having accepted the gift of civilization, we have, through our involvement with self-transcending projects, increased its value to our successors. We wish, that is, to perceive ourselves in the stream of history not only as recipients of a culture and tradition but also as builders of the future, as determiners of the conditions of future lives. "To the extent that men are purposive," writes Delattre:

The destruction of the future is suicidal by virtue of its radical alteration of the significance and possibilities of the present. The meaning of the present depends upon the vision of the future as well as the remembrance of the past. This is so in part because all projects require the future, and to foreclose projects is effectively to reduce the present to emptiness.⁵

Thus it is likely that we would feel a most profound malaise were we to be confronted with the certain knowledge that, beyond our lifetimes but early in the future of our civilization, an exploding sun would cause an abrupt, final, and complete end to the career of humanity and to all traces thereof. Fortunately, the available scientific evidence indicates that the sun will burn safely and constantly for several more billions of years. But whatever the solar contingencies, the physics of the sun is quite beyond our present or projected control.

206 Ernest Partridge

On the other hand, current social policies and technological developments *are* within our control, and many now being contemplated and enacted may bear portentous implications for the conditions of life for generations yet unborn. Among these developments are nuclear power and genetic engineering (examined by Hardy Jones and the Routleys later in this anthology). In addition, our generation might significantly affect the future through the continuing use of fluorocarbons (e.g., aerosol propellants), which could deplete the stratospheric ozone, or through the use of chlorinated hydrocarbons (e.g., DDT), which could permanently damage the integrity of the world ecosystem. Each of these practices, and many others both current and projected, pose enduring threats to the earth's biosphere and thus to the security and abundance of life for future generations. Surely we of this generation wield an unprecedented power to enhance or to diminish the life prospects of our posterity. With this power comes dreadful responsibility; we may choose to ignore it, but we cannot evade it. To paraphrase Lincoln, we of this generation will be held accountable in spite of ourselves. Who cares? Most of us, I dare say, *do* care. We care about the remote effects of our voluntary and informed choices and policies — even effects so remote in time that they will take place beyond the span of our own lives and the lives of our children and grandchildren. Furthermore, those who feel and manifest this concern display psychological health and well-being, while those who lack such concern are personally impoverished and genuinely deserving of *pity*.

The Self and Society. It is time, now, to attempt to justify these bold claims. First, is “self transcendence,” as I contend, essential to the very nature of a well-functioning human personality? A strong case for this position is to be found in the writings of George Herbert Mead and John Dewey.⁶ (I will focus most of my attention on Mead, mindful that Dewey's position is, in most significant respects, quite similar.) Mead suggests, in effect, that the notion of a totally isolated self is a virtual contradiction. The *self*, he argues, has its origin, nurture, and sustenance in social acts. Furthermore, says Mead, the mind emerges through the acquisition, in social acts, of communication skills and the consequent absorption of the medium of “significant symbols” known as *language*. Accordingly, the self is defined and identified (i.e., “self-conscious”) only in terms of social experience and the consequent perception of a “generalized other” (or, roughly speaking, internalized norms or “conscience”). Moreover, even in moments of solitary reflection, the mind employs, in silent soliloquy, the fund of meanings (i.e., the language) of the community.

The upshot of the position of Mead and Dewey would seem to be that the self, *by its very origin and nature*, transcends the physical locus (of body, of sense impressions, and of behavior) that identifies the individual. “Self transcendence” becomes, then, not a moral desideratum but a basic fact of the human condition. To be sure, some persons may withdraw from human society and claim to be unconcerned with their effects upon others and with the future

fate of mankind. However, Mead and Dewey would argue, those who claim total psychic and moral autonomy are deceived. For, despite this manifest autonomy, their personality and selfhood have their origin in social acts and contexts, and their denial of this nature is a symptom of personality disorder. In brief, to be a healthy, well-functioning person is to have "significant others" in one's life and to wish to be significant *to* others and to affect consequences *for* others. Furthermore, this desire to extend one's self to others (either directly or through institutions and works) does not require that the significant persons, things, and events be physically proximate or contemporary with one's lifetime. The self, then, from its earliest origins in infancy, is *essentially* "transcendent." To be human is to "relate out," to identify with others, and to show concern for the well-being and endurance of (at least some) communal values, artifacts, and institutions.

If this admittedly impressionistic account is roughly accurate (both of Mead's and Dewey's position, and of human motivation), its significance is clear: "self transcendence" is *not* a more-or-less occasional and accidental characteristic of individuals and cultures. It is a consequence of universal conditions and circumstances of individual human development. A sense and expression of self-transcendence is thus as necessary for mental health as is exercise for physical health.

The Law of Import Transference. A second approach to self transcendence is suggested by George Santayana's account of "beauty" as "pleasure objectified."⁷ By this Santayana means that, when an object is perceived as beautiful, the pleasure of the aesthetic experience is projected into the object and interpreted as a quality thereof. While I do not wish either to defend or criticize this controversial theory, I find it quite illustrative of a psychological phenomenon that is widespread, familiar, and most significant to our account and defense of the motive of self transcendence. This psychological phenomenon may be summarized by what I will call "the law of import transference." The law states that if a person P feels that X (e.g., an institution, place, organization, principle, etc.) matters *to him*, P will also feel that X matters *objectively and intrinsically*. In other words, the significance and importance of an object *to* the agent is interpreted *by* the agent as a quality *of* the object itself. Thus the well-being and endurance of the significant object apart from, and beyond the lifetime of, the agent may become a concern *of* and a value *to* the agent—a part of his inventory of personal *interests or goods*. John Passmore expresses the point quite eloquently:

When men act for the sake of a future they will not live to see, it is for the most part out of love for persons, places, and forms of activity, a cherishing of them, nothing more grandiose. It is indeed self-contradictory to say: "I love him or her or that place or that institution or that activity, but I don't care what happens to it after my death." To love is, amongst other things, to care about the future of what we love. . . . This is most obvious when we love our wife, our children, our grand-

208 Ernest Partridge

children. But it is also true in the case of our more impersonal loves: our love for places, institutions and forms of activity.

The application of this point to posterity, then, is quite clear:

There is . . . no novelty in a concern for posterity, when posterity is thought of not abstractly—as “the future of mankind”—but as a world inhabited by individuals we love or feel a special interest in, a world containing institutions, social movements, forms of life to which we are devoted—or even, a world made up of persons some of whom might admire us.⁸

The “law of import transference,” I suggest, describes a universal phenomenon familiar to all of us. It is manifested in acts and observances of patriotism, and in the donation of time, talent, and substance to various causes, places, and institutions. It is also seen in posthumous trusts and bequests. Most dramatically, import transference is found in the willingness of a hero or a saint to die for the sake of other persons, his country, his religious beliefs, or his ideals.

“Unfortunately,” the critic may reply, “there are still *other* cases of import transference that may *not* manifest a motive for ‘self transcendence,’ or at least not the kind of ‘transcendence’ that would encourage just provision for future persons.” For example, the miser “transfers import” to money to the degree that this normally instrumentally good medium of exchange becomes, to him, an *intrinsic* good. He desires to own and to hoard money (something other than himself) for the sake of ownership alone and not for whatever might be purchased therewith. More generally, the selfish and acquisitive person (e.g., the landowner who “locks up” his holdings, or the art collector who keeps his collection in a vault, not for investment but for mere possession itself) does not fail to value things for themselves. Surely he does value them, but, in addition, he desires to *own* them.

The difference, I suggest, is that in the case of the selfish individual, the “transfer of import” is partial, while, for the artist, scholar, or philanthropist enjoying self transcendence in his work or in his benefactions, the transference is more complete. How is this so? Because the selfish person desires the well-being of other-than-self (e.g., his money, his land, or his art objects) for *his* sake. The “transcending” individual desires the well-being of the other-than-self (e.g., institution, artifact, place, ideal, etc.) for *its* sake, or perhaps for the sake of other persons who might benefit thereby. Thus we may suppose that the miser cares or thinks little of the fate of his hoard after his death (except, perchance, to wish that he could “take it with him”), while to the artist the anticipated fate of his creations after his death is of great interest and concern. In short, we may say that one is “fully self transcendent” when (a) he regards something other than himself as good in itself, *and* (b) when he desires the well-being and endurance of this “something else” for its own sake, apart from its future contingent effects upon him. Though the selfish person may fulfill the first condition, he fails the second.

We are left with an unsettled problem of no small significance. Even if we assume the truth of the law of import transference, we find that this law gives rise either to selfish behavior or to “fully self-transcendent” concern and involvement. (The possibility of still other results has not been excluded.) It follows, then, that of itself this “law” can supply no proof of a basic “need” for self transcendence. In other words, “import transference” is apparently *not* a sufficient cause of a motive for self transcendence. It may, however, be a necessary condition, in which case self transcendence may be said to be “grounded in,” or supported by, this alleged behavioral law. We thus find ourselves at the threshold of a difficult ethical challenge; we must show that rational, informed persons would prefer a mode of life with self-transcendent concerns (in the “full” sense) to a life that is wholly selfish. Later in this paper, I will attempt to show that it is, paradoxically, in our own best present interest to anticipate, care about, and prepare for a remote future that we will never see or enjoy.

Significance and Mortality. Another, somewhat existential account of the motive of self transcendence is based upon the universal human awareness of physical mortality—a price that each man must pay for his rationality and self-consciousness. Despite an abundance of religious and metaphysical doctrines of spiritual immortality and of physical resurrection, the time of personal presence and efficacy in the affairs of familiar and significant persons, places, and institutions is universally acknowledged to be coterminous with one’s physical life-span.

Surely I need not argue that the finitude of human life is a source of much preoccupation and regret. A myriad of religious doctrines and philosophical systems have been devised to offer hope, consolation, or at least perspective in the face of this common fate. All this is obvious and commonplace and thus can be set aside. However, there is one response to the awareness of mortality that is of considerable importance to our analysis, namely, the investment and devotion of time, talent, concern, loyalty, and financial substance in behalf of enduring and permanent causes, ideals, and institutions.

While there are, of course, many possible motives for these kinds of activities, I would like to focus upon one motive in particular, namely, the desire to extend the term of one’s influence and significance well beyond the term of one’s lifetime—a desire evident in arrangements for posthumous publications, in bequests and wills, in perpetual trusts (such as the Nobel Prize), and so forth. In such acts and provisions, we find clear manifestations of a will to transcend the limits of personal mortality by extending one’s self and influence into things, associations, and ideals that endure. Nicolai Hartmann offers an eloquent expression of this need to transcend the limits of one’s immediate life and circumstances:

In such a [self-transcending] life is fulfilled something of man’s destiny, which is to become a participant in the creation of the world. . . . But what will that signify,

210 Ernest Partridge

if [a person's] life-work dies with him, or soon after? It is just such work that requires permanence, continuation, a living energy of its own. It inheres in the nature of all effort that looks to an objective value, to go on beyond the life and enterprise of the individual, into a future which he can no longer enjoy. It is not only the fate but is also the pride of a creative mind and is inseparable from his task, that his work survives him, and therefore passes from him to others, in whose life he has no part.

. . . The content of a fruitful ideal necessarily lies beyond the momentary actual. And because it reaches beyond the limits of an individual life, it naturally reduces the individual to a link in the chain of life, which connects the past with the future. Man sees himself caught up into a larger providence, which looks beyond him and yet is his own.⁹

With the awareness of mortality comes existential anguish and dread—the heavy price we pay for self-awareness, time-perception, and abstract knowledge of the external world and our place in it. But a consciousness of mortality also evokes some of our finer moral qualities. For instance, mindful of our finitude, we make provision for a future beyond our own lifetimes, and, conversely, we feel morally obligated to honor the wills and reputations of the deceased. But both the preparing and the honoring of wills would make no sense if we egoistically confined all import and values to our own experiences and satisfactions. Yet provision for a posthumous future and respect for the previously recorded wishes of those now dead is commonplace and universally sanctioned. Such behavior is possible only in a community of individuals who share and exercise capacities for self-consciousness, hypothetical reflection, self-transcending interests, and abstract moral reasoning. Given these capacities, and through them an operative and effective provision for the posthumous future, the personal, moral, social, and material well-being of the community is significantly enhanced from generation to generation. For, just as our lives are enriched by the knowledge that we might make provision for our children and grandchildren (not to mention unrelated members of future generations), so too has each of us benefited from the private and public bequests that have followed from our predecessors' desires to benefit those who would live after them.¹⁰

Alienation: The Self Alone. I have, to this point, attempted to indicate that self transcendence is a basic and virtually universal human need. In defense of this assertion, I have cited what seem to be necessary and general conditions of human development, evaluation, and awareness. I would like now to examine the issue of self transcendence from a different perspective. Specifically, I would like to examine the results of even a partial deprivation of the alleged "need" for self transcendence. If, as I have suggested, this need is basic to human nature, a denial thereof should produce clear and dramatic results.

In much contemporary sociological and psychological literature, this denial of self transcendence has been described as "alienation." In the introduction to their anthology *Man Alone*, Eric and Mary Josephson present a

vivid account of the broad range of sources and manifestations of alienation in contemporary life:

Confused as to his place in the scheme of a world growing each day closer yet more impersonal, more densely populated yet in face-to-face relations more dehumanized; a world appealing ever more widely for his concern and sympathy with unknown masses of men, yet fundamentally alienating him even from his next neighbor, today Western man has become mechanized, routinized, made comfortable as an object; but in the profound sense displaced and thrown off balance as the subjective creator and power. This theme of the alienation of modern man runs through the literature and drama of two continents; it can be traced in the content as well as the form of modern art; it preoccupies theologians and philosophers, and to many psychologists and sociologists, it is the central problem of our time. In various ways they tell us that ties have snapped that formerly bound Western man to himself and to the world about him. In diverse language they say that man in modern industrial societies is rapidly becoming detached from nature, from his old gods, from the technology that has transformed his environment and now threatens to destroy it; from his work and its products, and from his leisure; from the complex social institutions that presumably serve but are more likely to manipulate him; from the community in which he lives; and above all from himself—from his body and his sex, from his feelings of love and tenderness, and from his art—his creative and productive potential.¹¹

Clearly the Josephsons have described here a sizable array of social and personal disorders. I should not, and will not, attempt to respond to more than a few of them. Most of the symptoms that I will discuss fall under the category of *personal or psychological alienation*.

Erich Fromm eloquently describes personal alienation as “a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts—but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship.” In other words, says Fromm, an alienated person “does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished ‘thing,’ dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance.”¹²

It is all too easy to find examples of alienation in contemporary life. For example, the worker finds that he, or she, is a replaceable part in the assembly line or shop. His job activity is governed by machines (most ubiquitously, the clock). The product of his labor shows no evidence of his distinct personality or skills. Even if he wears a white collar and brings an inventory of acquired professional skills to his work, he may perform as a faceless functionary, with little personal style evident or required in his task. The management of his household, his shopping habits, travel arrangements, even his leisure activities, are mechanized and impersonal. The utilities and services that sustain his life and creature comforts are themselves maintained by an unfathomable network of electronic, mechanical, and cybernetic devices that at any moment could

212 Ernest Partridge

collapse from the weight of their own complexity. Economic and political forces that may radically disrupt his life are unresponsive to his needs and beyond his control; indeed, they may even be beyond the conscious and deliberate control of *any* persons, either in public or in private offices.

In brief, the alienated person shrinks into himself. He loses control over the social, economic, and political forces that determine his destiny. With loss of control comes indifference and apathy. Because, in his social contacts, he is responded to ever more in terms of his *functions*, and ever less in terms of his personality and autonomy, he becomes estranged from the wellsprings of his own unique personal being. He becomes, that is, alienated from *himself*. He is left aimless, vulnerable, insignificant, solitary, and *finite*. In such a condition not only does he lose his self-respect; even worse, he is hard-pressed to recognize and define the *identity* of his own self.

In alienation we find the very antithesis of self transcendence. There is no feeling, within a state of alienation, of a personal contribution to grand projects, no sense of involvement in significant events, no investment and expansion of one's self and substance into enduring causes and institutions. Surrounded by institutions, machines, individuals, social trends, for which he has no significance and to which he can thus "transfer" no "import," one truly lives in an alien world. Surely alienation is a dreadful condition, made no less so by its widespread and growing manifestations in contemporary society. It is a condition that no rational person would happily wish upon himself.

And what is the alternative, even more the *remedy*, for this dismal condition? Clearly, it would appear to be a life committed to self-transcending concerns and interests. Such a life, writes Kenneth Kenniston, displays "human wholeness," by which he means "a capacity for commitment, dedication, passionate concern, and care—a capacity for wholeheartedness, and single-mindedness, for abandon without fear of self-annihilation and loss of identity."¹³ For Erich Fromm, the commonplace word "love" describes the transcending reach from self to another self, or to an ideal.

There is only one passion which satisfies man's need to unite himself with the world, and to acquire at the same time a sense of integrity and individuality, and this is *love*. *Love is union* with somebody, or something, outside oneself, *under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self*. It is an experience of sharing, of communion, which permits the full unfolding of one's own inner activity. The experience of love does away with the necessity of illusions . . . [T]he reality of active sharing and loving permits me to transcend my individualized existence, and at the same time to experience myself as the bearer of the active powers which constitute the act of loving.¹⁴

Furthermore, writes Fromm, the self-transcending lover, as the "bearer of active powers," is a creator, for "in the act of creation man transcends himself beyond the passivity and accidentalness of his existence into the realm of purposefulness and freedom. In man's need for transcendence lies one of the roots for love, as well as for art, religion, and material production."¹⁵

Narcissism: The Self Contained. A lack of self-transcending concern is also a feature of *narcissism*, a personality disorder that is currently attracting widespread attention and interest in the social and behavioral sciences.¹⁶ In his popular and provocative book *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch describes the narcissist as one who experiences

intense feelings of emptiness and inauthenticity. Although the narcissist can function in the everyday world and often charms other people . . . , his devaluation of others, together with his lack of curiosity about them, impoverishes his personal life and reinforces the “subjective experience of emptiness.” Lacking any real intellectual engagement with the world—notwithstanding a frequently inflated estimate of his own intellectual abilities—he has little capacity for sublimation. He therefore depends on others for constant infusions of approval and admiration. He “must attach [himself] to someone, living an almost parasitic” existence. At the same time, his fear of emotional dependence, together with his manipulative, exploitative approach to personal relations, makes these relations bland, superficial, and deeply unsatisfying.¹⁷

The essence of narcissism, writes Fromm, is “a failure of relatedness.” In fact, “one understands fully man’s need to be related only if one considers the outcome of the failure of any kind of relatedness, if one appreciates the meaning of *narcissism*. Narcissism is the essence of all severe psychic pathology. For the narcissistically involved person, there is only one reality, that of his own thought processes, feelings and needs. The world outside is not experienced or perceived *objectively*, i.e., as existing in its own terms. . . . Narcissism is the opposite pole to objectivity, reason and love . . . The fact that utter failure to relate oneself to the world is insanity, points to the other fact: that some form of relatedness is the condition for any kind of sane living.”¹⁸

Of particular interest to our analysis is the effect of the narcissistic orientation in our culture upon “the sense of historical time.” We live these days for ourselves, writes Lasch, and “not for [our] predecessors or posterity.” We are, he claims, “fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future.”¹⁹ This loss of historical consciousness, coupled with a general lack of self-transcending concern, exacts a heavy penalty as one approaches the second half of his life. For at mid-life, writes Lasch, “the usual defenses against the ravages of age—identification with ethical or artistic values beyond one’s immediate interests [!], intellectual curiosity, the consoling emotional warmth derived from happy relationships in the past—can do nothing for the narcissist.” And he is “unable to derive whatever comfort comes from identification with historical continuity.”²⁰ Lasch quotes Kernberg, who observes that “to be able to enjoy life in a process involving a growing identification with other people’s happiness and achievements is tragically beyond the capacity of narcissistic personalities.”²¹ And so, “the fear of death takes on a new intensity in a society that has deprived itself of religion and shows little interest in posterity.”²²

214 Ernest Partridge

In contrast, the “traditional consolations of old age” are available to those with an authentic and active sense of self-transcending concern. Of these consolations, “the most important . . . is the belief that future generations will in some sense carry on [one’s] life work. Love and work unite in a concern for posterity, and specifically in an attempt to equip the younger generation to carry on the tasks of the older. The thought that we live on vicariously in our children (more broadly, in the future generations) reconciles us to our own supercession.”²³

Is self-transcendent concern an appropriate “prescription” for the narcissist? Perhaps. But that simple answer, and even worse that simple question, may be wholly inadequate and inappropriate in the face of the complexity of the issue of narcissism.²⁴ Some narcissists may be beyond relief. At best, narcissism appears to be one of the more difficult personality disorders to treat (due, in part, to the narcissist’s virtuoso skills at manipulation, evasion, and self-deceit).²⁵ But these considerations are of psychiatric interest. Our question is more fundamental: Is “self-transcendent concern” essential to a healthy and fulfilling human life? And, conversely, is a life without such concern a basically impoverished life—a life that a rational disinterested person would not choose for himself? This brief sketch of the psychopathology of narcissism suggests that an examination of this personality disorder gives us further reason to suppose that to be a healthy, happy, fulfilled person, one *needs* self-transcending interests and concerns. Beyond that, humane sympathy and concern should lead us to support efforts to *prevent* narcissistic disorders (e.g., through social reform, moral education, etc.), and to support efforts to treat those who, nonetheless, suffer from this disorder. But, while these are worthy objectives, a discussion thereof would lead us away from the topic of this paper.

Two Contrary Cases: The Recluse and the Playboy. Earlier it was suggested that alienation is “the very antithesis of self transcendence. But isn’t this an overstatement? Might we not find cases of individuals who appear to be both “self transcendent” and alienated, and still other cases of individuals (e.g., *narcissists*) who appear to be *neither* self-transcendent nor alienated?²⁶

In the first case, consider such solitary persons as Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Though these individuals voluntarily withdrew from their communities, surely their lives cannot be said to have been unproductive and without purpose. Indeed, in their own views and that of others, Thoreau and Muir pursued lives of transcending significance. However, they were *not alienated*. To be sure, while Thoreau was alienated from the commonplace, commercial, and civic routines of Concord, he nevertheless perceived himself as a member of a community of ideas and, of course, a community of nature. He shunned the way of life of his neighbors not because he felt his life had no significance but because he sought a variant and, he believed, a *deeper* significance. He chose, that is, to “march to the sound of a *different* drummer.” He did not refuse to “march” at all. His writing is directed to causes, issues, and times that extend far beyond his immediate circumstances. Thoreau’s life supplies eloquent evidence that *solitude* need not imply alienation.

But can a life display *neither* self transcendence nor alienation? Consider the “playboy,” the self-indulgent, narcissistic hedonist who “takes no care for the morrow,” much less posterity. If such a person is healthy, wealthy, personable, and attractive, can he be said to be “alienated”? It would seem, quite to the contrary, that he is living not in an “alien” world but in a world quite friendly to his tastes and whims. And if the playboy is not alienated, then isn’t he, necessarily, the opposite, that is, self-transcendent? But how could this be so? Or might he not, in fact, be neither alienated nor self-transcendent, and yet, for all that, lead an enviable life?

These questions lead us to an important point, namely, that a life not filled during every waking moment with self-transcendent causes and projects is not necessarily an alienated life. Neither is a person who is *occasionally* self-absorbed a narcissist. While there are appropriate times in any life for simple, trivial, egoistic, self-sufficient activities and pleasures, a life *totally* devoid of any awareness of, concern for, involvement with, or valuing of things, persons, institutions, and ideals, *for the sake thereof*, would in fact be an alienated life, and a person *totally* absorbed in his self-interested concerns would be properly described as a narcissist. Consider, then, that paradigmatic hedonist, Hugh Hefner, the publisher of *Playboy* magazine. Is he “alienated”? Apparently not, for despite all his mansions, jets, hi-fi’s, and bunnies, Hefner has also established “The Playboy Foundation” (which is involved in such public issues as civil liberties), he has published a “playboy philosophy” (a philosophical position, of sorts), and he has contributed generously to various social and political causes. All of these enterprises and benefactions would seem to manifest a desire for self transcendence.

If not even Hugh Hefner presents a refuting case, let us then concoct an extreme paradigm. Imagine a person with health, wealth, sophistication, social grace, and so on, who cares for nothing in life but his own personal satisfaction, and values nothing except as it immediately contributes to this satisfaction—in other words, a textbook example of a narcissist. Assume, further, that, with his generous endowments, his selfish interests are routinely satisfied. Would such a person, having no concern for the well-being of anything else (for *its* own sake), lead an enviable life—the sort of life that a rationally self-interested individual would desire for himself?

Despite all his good fortune and opportunity, such a person might, I suspect, be inclined to feel that his life was confined and confining. By hypothesis, nothing would matter to him, unless it had impact upon the course of his personal life plan. He would have no interest in persons he would never meet, places he would never see, and events and circumstances outside the span of his lifetime. In other words, those persons, places, and events with which he was not directly involved would be “alien” to him. With all significant events confined to the span of his lifetime, the consciousness of his own mortality would be especially burdensome.²⁷ While this is a life-style that we might be tempted to try for a while (given the chance), I wonder if we could bear it for a lifetime. (“A great place to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live there.”) If, as I

216 Ernest Partridge

suspect, such a life does not "wear well," this might explain why it seems that those new to wealth are more inclined to indulge themselves with gadgetry, diversions, and opulence, while those born to wealth generally involve themselves with such self-transcendent concerns as philanthropy, the arts, social work, and political issues.

I have said that I "suspect" that an opulent, self-centered, narcissistic life would be confining and, concerning all things outside the small egocentric confinement, *alienating*. Unfortunately, we shall have to close with nothing more substantial than this "suspicion." Surely much literary and psychological evidence might be brought to bear upon the question of the relationship between self-indulgence and alienation. Furthermore, one might conceive of some sort of direct empirical study of the issue, albeit the execution of such a study might be a trifle awkward (e.g., "Tell me, Howard Hughes, are you *really* happy?"). All this, however, is beyond the scope of this inquiry. What remains is the tentative conclusion that, while an enlightened egoist might prefer the life of the alienated, narcissistic millionaire to that of some other possible choices, given the additional happy option he would, I believe, much prefer to utilize the millionaire's resources and circumstances in a life containing self-transcending projects and concerns.

The Paradox of Morality. Throughout these explorations of the proposed "need for self transcendence," we have found manifestation of evidence of what is often called "the paradox of morality." Briefly, the paradox is found in the common circumstance that one appears to live best for oneself when one lives for the sake of others. While the rule may seem pious and banal, it points to a profound and recurring theme in religion and moral philosophy, a theme that is especially prominent in the writings of contract theorists from Thomas Hobbes to John Rawls.²⁸ Statements of the moral paradox are abundant in the writings of contemporary philosophers. For instance, Kai Nielsen writes: "There are good Hobbesian reasons for rational and self-interested people to accept the moral point of view. A rational egoist will naturally desire the most extensive liberty compatible with his own self-interest, but he will also see that this is the most fully achievable in a context of community life where the moral point of view prevails."²⁹ Consider also Michael Scriven's position:

Each citizen's chances of a satisfying life for himself are increased by a process of conditioning all citizens *not* to treat their own satisfaction as the most important goal. Specifically, a system which inculcates genuine concern for the welfare of others is, it will be argued, the most effective system for increasing the welfare of each individual. Put paradoxically, there are circumstances in which one can give a selfish justification for unselfishness.³⁰

"The paradox of morality," then, supplies still another argument for self transcendence. But it is an argument with a difference. In our earlier discussion of the motive of self transcendence, we adopted a psychological approach; that is, we considered the need for self transcendence from the perspective of

its origin and sustenance in human experience and behavior. Thus a life “transcended” is perceived to be a healthy life, while an alienated or narcissistic life is perceived to be impoverished. In contrast, the argument from the moral paradox directly *recommends* self transcendence (in the form of “the moral point of view”) as a more prudent policy for achieving self-enrichment and personal satisfaction.

At the outset of this discussion of “the paradox of morality,” I admitted that, on first encounter, this principle seemed “pious and banal.” I hope I have, in the intervening paragraphs, added some substance to the notion. Perhaps the paradox seems less “pious and banal,” and is given a more severe testing, when it is applied to the question of the duty to posterity. In such a case, those who defend such a duty and urge thoughtful and responsible provision for the future might wish to affirm that life is immediately enriched by the collective agreement of the living to provide for the well-being of the unborn. This is the position of economist Kenneth Boulding:

Why should we not maximize the welfare of this generation at the cost of posterity? *Après nous le déluge* has been the motto of not insignificant numbers of human societies. The only answer to this, as far as I can see, is to point out that the welfare of the individual depends on the extent to which he can identify himself with others, and that the most satisfactory individual identity is that which identifies not only with a community in space but also with a community extending over time from the past into the future. . . . This whole problem is linked up with the much larger one of the determinants of the morale, legitimacy, and “nerve” of a society, and there is a great deal of historical evidence to suggest that a society which loses its identity with posterity and which loses its positive image of the future loses also its capacity to deal with the present problems and soon falls apart.³¹

If I interpret Boulding correctly, he is saying, in essence, that we need the future, *now*.

“*Self Transcendence*”: *A Summary*. In this paper I have tried to defend the position that healthy, well-functioning human beings have a basic and pervasive need to transcend themselves; that is, to identify themselves as a part of larger, ongoing, and enduring processes, projects, institutions, and ideals. Furthermore, I have contended that, if persons are deceived into believing that they can live in and for themselves alone, they will suffer for it both individually and communally. If my presentation of the concept of “self transcendence” has been even moderately successful, we may be prepared to answer the cynic’s taunt: “Why should we care about posterity; what has posterity ever done for us?” Our duty to make just provision for the future, I contend, is *not* of the form of an *obligation*—not, that is, a contractual agreement to exchange favors or services. To be sure, posterity does not actually exist *now*. Even so, in a strangely abstract and metaphorical sense, posterity may extend profound favors for the living. For posterity exists as an *idea*, a potentiality, and a valid object of transpersonal devotion, concern, purpose, and commitment. Without

218 Ernest Partridge

this idea and potentiality, our lives would be confined, empty, bleak, pointless, and morally impoverished. In acting for posterity's good we act for our own as well. Paradoxically, we owe it to *ourselves* to be duty-bound to posterity, in a manner that genuinely focuses upon future needs rather than our own. By fulfilling our just duties to posterity, we may now earn and enjoy, in our self-fulfillment, the favors of posterity.³²

NOTES

1. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 145, 176.

2. It is, I think, a bit unsporting for an editor to invite a paper, only to prop it up as a target for his own polemic. It is especially so when the author of the target has no opportunity for rebuttal. And so, rather than abuse my advantage, I shall simply point out my differences with Professor Thompson in these opening paragraphs and then make no further mention of his paper during the remainder of this piece.

3. Apparently this is not a rare or trivial sentiment, for, as Peter Laslett points out, "no little portion of political life rests upon" the premise that we have moral duties toward the yet-unborn. He continues:

The speeches of ministers, the propaganda of parties, the actions of planners, the demands of administrators, unhesitatingly assume that men ordinarily recognize the right of generations yet to come. The additional and significant paradox here is that this assumption is well founded in behavior. We do in fact respond quite spontaneously to an appeal on behalf of the future. [Peter Laslett, "The Conversation Between the Generations," in *The Proper Study*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 78.]

4. Robinson Jeffers, "Nova," *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Random House, 1927), p. 597.

5. Edwin Delattre, "Rights, Responsibilities and Future Persons," *Ethics*, 82 (April 1972), p. 256.

6. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1958), chapter 6. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: Phoenix, 1956). The social-psychological theories of Mead and Dewey are exceedingly complex (a circumstance aggravated by the obscurity of their writing styles), and I haven't the space even to attempt an adequate summary thereof.

7. George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1955).

8. John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (New York: Scribner, 1974), pp. 88-9.

9. Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 2: *Moral Values* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 313, 324 [in this anthology, pp. 305-08].

10. The critical reader will justifiably object that I have presented in this paragraph a statement of position without much of a supporting argument. I should therefore point out that support for these conclusions, as well as an elaboration of this position, may be found in Parts 4-6 of my paper, "Posthumous Interests and Posthumous Respect," *Ethics*, 91 (January 1981).

11. Eric and Mary Josephson, Introduction to *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* (New York: Dell, 1962), pp. 10–11.

12. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Fawcett, 1955), pp. 111, 114.

13. Kenneth Kenniston, *The Uncommitted* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), p. 441.

14. Fromm, pp. 36–37, 41–42.

15. *Ibid.*

16. How is *narcissism* related to *alienation*? Is narcissism a *type* of alienation? A *cause* of alienation? Are they otherwise related? These are complicated and interesting questions whose resolutions rest upon differing definitions of these terms, different theories of their etiology, and different accounts of their symptomatology. We cannot, and fortunately need not, devote much space to these questions. It suffices for our purposes to note that both alienation and narcissism are unenviable conditions and are characterized by a lack of self-transcending concern.

17. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 39–40. The quotations within are from Otto Kernberg. Kernberg's primary work on this topic is *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1975).

18. Erich Fromm, pp. 39–41. It should be noted that Lasch is quite impatient with Fromm's habit of expanding the scope of the concept of "narcissism," thus "drain[ing] the idea of its clinical meaning" (Lasch, p. 31). Even so, I believe that the passage from Fromm, quoted above, serves my purpose well without seriously compromising Lasch's sense of the term "narcissism."

19. Lasch, p. 5.

20. Lasch, p. 41.

21. Otto Kernberg, quoted in Lasch, p. 41.

22. Lasch, p. 208.

23. Lasch, p. 210.

24. Even so, "transcendence" seems to be a favored treatment strategy of some psychotherapists. For instance, Lasch cites Heinz Kohut in this regard: "Useful, creative work, which confronts the individual with 'unsolved intellectual and aesthetic problems' and thereby mobilizes narcissism on behalf of activities outside the self provides the narcissist with the best hope of transcending his predicament" (Lasch, p. 17n). The source from Kohut is *The Analysis of the Self . . .* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), p. 315.

25. Lasch, pp. 40–1.

26. Even if we conclude that alienation and self transcendence are "antitheses," there is no contradiction in stating that a person is transcendent with regard to some X, while at the same time alienated from a distinct Y. The life of Thoreau seems to be a case in point.

27. As we have seen, this seems to be precisely the fate of the narcissistic personality.

28. Thus Jesus said: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). In a contemporary paraphrase of this scripture, William Frankena writes:

If we believe psychologists like Erich Fromm and others, . . . for one's life to be the best possible, even in the non-moral sense of best, the activities and experiences which form one side of life must (1) be largely concerned with objects or causes other than one's own welfare and (2) must be such as to give one a sense of achievement and excellence. Otherwise its goodness will remain truncated and incomplete. He

220 Ernest Partridge

that loses his life in sense (1) shall find it in sense (2). [*Ethics*, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 76-7.]

For a suggestive and influential application of "the moral paradox" to ecological issues, see Garrett Hardin's justly celebrated essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science*, 162 (1968), 1243-8.

29. Kai Nielsen, "Problems of Ethics," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan & Free Press, 1967), p. 132.

30. Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 240.

31. Kenneth Boulding, "The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth," in *The Environmental Handbook*, ed. Garrett de Bell (New York: Ballantine, 1970), pp. 99-100.

32. Over half of this paper appeared originally in Section 42 of my doctoral dissertation, *Rawls and the Duty to Posterity* (University of Utah, 1976). This version was prepared especially for this anthology. I am grateful to Dr. R. Jan Stout for advising me of the appropriateness of my use of psychiatric terms and concepts in this version. Much of the final work on this paper was accomplished during the term of a Fellowship in Environmental Affairs from the Rockefeller Foundation. I am grateful to the Foundation for this support.

Global environment and international inequality

HENRY SHUE

My aim is to establish that three commonsense principles of fairness, none of them dependent upon controversial philosophical theories of justice, give rise to the same conclusion about the allocation of the costs of protecting the environment.

Poor states and rich states have long dealt with each other primarily upon unequal terms. The imposition of unequal terms has been relatively easy for the rich states because they have rarely needed to ask for the voluntary cooperation of the less powerful poor states. Now the rich countries have realized that their own industrial activity has been destroying the ozone in the earth's atmosphere and has been making far and away the greatest contribution to global warming. They would like the poor states to avoid adopting the same form of industrialization by which they themselves became rich. It is increasingly clear that if poor states pursue their own economic development with the same disregard for the natural environment and the economic welfare of other states that rich states displayed in the past during their development, everyone will continue to suffer the effects of environmental destruction. Consequently, it is at least conceivable that rich states might now be willing to consider dealing cooperatively on equitable terms with poor states in a manner that gives due weight to both the economic development of poor states and the preservation of the natural environment.

If we are to have any hope of pursuing equitable cooperation, we must try to arrive at a consensus about what equity means. And we need to define equity, not as a vague abstraction, but concretely and specifically in the context of both development of the economy in poor states and preservation of the environment everywhere.

Fundamental fairness and acceptable inequality

What diplomats and lawyers call equity incorporates important aspects of what ordinary people everywhere call fairness. The concept of fairness is neither

Eastern nor Western, Northern nor Southern, but universal.¹ People everywhere understand what it means to ask whether an arrangement is fair or biased towards some parties over other parties. If you own the land but I supply the labour, or you own the seed but I own the ox, or you are old but I am young, or you are female but I am male, or you have an education and I do not, or you worked long and hard but I was lazy—in situation after situation it makes perfectly good sense to ask whether a particular division of something among two or more parties is fair to all the parties, in light of this or that difference between them. All people understand the question, even where they have been taught not to ask it. What would be fair? Or, as the lawyers and diplomats would put it, which arrangement would be equitable?

Naturally, it is also possible to ask other kinds of questions about the same arrangements. One can always ask economic questions, for instance, in addition to ethical questions concerning equity: would it increase total output if, say, women were paid less and men were paid more? Would it be more efficient? Sometimes the most efficient arrangement happens also to be fair to all parties, but often it is unfair. Then a choice has to be made between efficiency and fairness. Before it is possible to discuss such choices, however, we need to know the meaning of equity: what are the standards of equity and how do they matter?

Complete egalitarianism—the belief that all good things ought to be shared equally among all people—can be a powerfully attractive view, and it is much more difficult to argue against than many of its opponents seem to think. I shall, nevertheless, assume here that complete egalitarianism is unacceptable. If it were the appropriate view to adopt, our inquiry into equity could end now. The answer to the question, ‘what is an equitable arrangement?’ would always be the same: an equal distribution. Only equality would ever provide equity.

While I do assume that it may be equitable for some good things to be distributed unequally, I also assume that other things must be kept equal—most importantly, dignity and respect. It is part of the current international consensus that every person is entitled to equal dignity and equal respect. In traditional societies in both hemispheres, even the equality of dignity and respect was denied in theory as well as practice. Now, although principles of equality are still widely violated in practice, inequality of dignity and of respect have relatively few public advocates even among those who practice them. If it is equitable for some other human goods to be distributed unequally, but it is not equitable for dignity or respect to be unequal, the central questions become: ‘which inequalities in which other human goods are compatible with equal human dignity and equal human respect?’ and ‘which inequalities in other goods ought to be eliminated, reduced or prevented from being increased?’

When one is beginning from an existing inequality, like the current inequality in wealth between North and South, three critical kinds of justification are:

¹ Or so I believe. I would be intensely interested in any evidence of a culture that seems to lack a concept of fairness, as distinguished from evidence about two cultures whose specific conceptions of fairness differ in some respects.

Global environment and international inequality

533

justifications of unequal burdens intended to reduce or eliminate the existing inequality by removing an unfair advantage of those at the top; justifications of unequal burdens intended to prevent the existing inequality from becoming worse through any infliction of an unfair additional disadvantage upon those at the bottom; and justifications of a guaranteed minimum intended to prevent the existing inequality from becoming worse through any infliction of an unfair additional disadvantage upon those at the bottom. The second justification for unequal burdens and the justification for a guaranteed minimum are the same: two different mechanisms are being used to achieve fundamentally the same purpose. I shall look at these two forms of justification for unequal burdens and then at the justification for a guaranteed minimum.

Unequal burdens*Greater contribution to the problem*

All over the world parents teach their children to clean up their own mess. This simple rule makes good sense from the point of view of incentive: if one learns that one will not be allowed to get away with simply walking away from whatever messes one creates, one is given a strong negative incentive against making messes in the first place. Whoever makes the mess presumably does so in the process of pursuing some benefit—for a child, the benefit may simply be the pleasure of playing with the objects that constitute the mess. If one learns that whoever reaps the benefit of making the mess must also be the one who pays the cost of cleaning up the mess, one learns at the very least not to make messes with costs that are greater than their benefits.

Economists have glorified this simple rule as the 'internalization of externalities'. If the basis for the price of a product does not incorporate the costs of cleaning up the mess made in the process of producing the product, the costs are being externalized, that is, dumped upon other parties. Incorporating into the basis of the price of the product the costs that had been coercively socialized is called internalizing an externality.

At least as important as the consideration of incentives, however, is the consideration of fairness or equity. If whoever makes a mess receives the benefits and does not pay the costs, not only does he have no incentive to avoid making as many messes as he likes, but he is also unfair to whoever does pay the costs. He is inflicting costs upon other people, contrary to their interests and, presumably, without their consent. By making himself better off in ways that make others worse off, he is creating an expanding inequality.

Once such an inequality has been created unilaterally by someone's imposing costs upon other people, we are justified in reversing the inequality by imposing extra burdens upon the producer of the inequality. There are two separate points here. First, we are justified in assigning additional burdens to the party who has been inflicting costs upon us. Second, the minimum extent of the

compensatory burden we are justified in assigning is enough to correct the inequality previously unilaterally imposed. The purpose of the extra burden is to restore an equality that was disrupted unilaterally and arbitrarily (or to reduce an inequality that was enlarged unilaterally and arbitrarily). In order to accomplish that purpose, the extra burden assigned must be at least equal to the unfair advantage previously taken. This yields us our first principle of equity:

When a party has in the past taken an unfair advantage of others by imposing costs upon them without their consent, those who have been unilaterally put at a disadvantage are entitled to demand that in the future the offending party shoulder burdens that are unequal at least to the extent of the unfair advantage previously taken, in order to restore equality.²

In the area of development and the environment, the clearest cases that fall under this first principle of equity are the partial destruction of the ozone layer and the initiation of global warming by the process of industrialization that has enriched the North but not the South. Unilateral initiatives by the so-called developed countries (DCs) have made them rich, while leaving the less developed countries (LDCs) poor. In the process the industrial activities and accompanying lifestyles of the DCs have inflicted major global damage upon the earth's atmosphere. Both kinds of damage are harmful to those who did not benefit from Northern industrialization as well as to those who did. Those societies whose activities have damaged the atmosphere ought, according to the first principle of equity, to bear sufficiently unequal burdens henceforth to correct the inequality that they have imposed. In this case, everyone is bearing costs—because the damage was universal—but the benefits have been overwhelmingly skewed towards those who have become rich in the process.

This principle of equity should be distinguished from the considerably weaker—because entirely forward-looking—'polluter pays principle' (PPP), which requires only that all future costs of pollution (in production or consumption) be henceforth internalized into prices. Even the OECD formally adopted the PPP in 1974, to govern relations among rich states.³

Spokespeople for the rich countries make at least three kinds of counter-arguments to this first principle of equity. These are:

1. The LDCs have also benefited, it is said, from the enrichment of the DCs. Usually it is conceded that the industrial countries have benefited more than the non-industrialized. Yet it is maintained that, for example, medicines and technologies made possible by the lifestyles of the rich countries have also reached the poor countries, bringing benefits that the poor countries could not have produced as soon for themselves.

² A preliminary presentation of these principles at New York University Law School has been helpfully commented upon in Thomas M. Franck, *Fairness in international law and institutions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 390–91.

³ OECD Council, 14 November 1974C (1974), 223 (Paris: OECD, 1974).

Quite a bit of breath and ink has been spent in arguments over how much LDCs have benefited from the technologies and other advances made by the DCs, compared to the benefits enjoyed by the DCs themselves. Yet this dispute does not need to be settled in order to decide questions of equity. Whatever benefits LDCs have received, they have mostly been charged for. No doubt some improvements have been widespread. Yet, except for a relative trickle of aid, all transfers have been charged to the recipients, who have in fact been left with an enormous burden of debt, much of it incurred precisely in the effort to purchase the good things produced by industrialization.

Overall, poor countries have been charged for any benefits that they have received by someone in the rich countries, evening that account. Much greater additional benefits have gone to the rich countries themselves, including a major contribution to the very process of their becoming so much richer than the poor countries. Meanwhile, the environmental damage caused by the process has been incurred by everyone. The rich countries have profited to the extent of the excess of the benefits gained by them over the costs incurred by everyone through environmental damage done by them, and ought in future to bear extra burdens in dealing with the damage they have done.

2. Whatever environmental damage has been done, it is said, was unintentional. Now we know all sorts of things about CFCs and the ozone layer, and about carbon dioxide and the greenhouse effect, that no one dreamed of when CFCs were created or when industrialization fed with fossil fuels began. People cannot be held responsible, it is maintained, for harmful effects that they could not have foreseen. The philosopher Immanuel Kant is often quoted in the West for having said, 'Ought presupposes can'—it can be true that one ought to have done something only if one actually could have done it. Therefore, it is allegedly not fair to hold people responsible for effects they could not have avoided because the effects could not have been predicted.

This objection rests upon a confusion between punishment and responsibility. It is not fair to punish someone for producing effects that could not have been avoided, but it is common to hold people responsible for effects that were unforeseen and unavoidable.

We noted earlier that, in order to be justifiable, an inequality in something between two or more parties must be compatible with an equality of dignity and respect between the parties. If there were an inequality between two groups of people such that members of the first group could create problems and then expect members of the second group to deal with the problems, that inequality would be incompatible with equal respect and equal dignity. For the members of the second group would in fact be functioning as servants for the first group. If I said to you, 'I broke it, but I want you to clean it up', then I would be your master and you would be my servant. If I thought that you should do my bidding, I could hardly respect you as my equal.

It is true, then, that the owners of many coal-burning factories could not possibly have known the bad effects of the carbon dioxide they were releasing

into the atmosphere, and therefore could not possibly have intended to contribute to harming it. It would, therefore, be unfair to punish them—by, for example, demanding that they pay double or triple damages. It is not in the least unfair, however, simply to hold them responsible for the damage that they have in fact done. This naturally leads to the third objection.

3. Even if it is fair to hold a person responsible for damage done unintentionally, it will be said, it is not fair to hold the person responsible for damage he did not do himself. It would not be fair, for example, to hold a grandson responsible for damage done by his grandfather. Yet it is claimed this is exactly what is being done when the current generation is held responsible for carbon dioxide emissions produced in the nineteenth century. Perhaps Europeans living today are responsible for atmosphere-damaging gases emitted today, but it is not fair to hold people responsible for deeds done long before they were born.

This objection appeals to a reasonable principle, namely that one person ought not to be held responsible for what is done by another person who is completely unrelated. 'Completely unrelated' is, however, a critical portion of the principle. To assume that the facts about the industrial North's contribution to global warming straightforwardly fall under this principle is to assume that they are considerably simpler than they actually are.

First, and undeniably, the industrial states' contributions to global warming have continued unabated long since it became impossible to plead ignorance. It would have been conceivable that as soon as evidence began to accumulate that industrial activity was having a dangerous environmental effect, the industrial states would have adopted a conservative or even cautious policy of cutting back greenhouse-gas emissions or at least slowing their rate of increase. For the most part this has not happened.

Second, today's generation in the industrial states is far from completely unrelated to the earlier generations going back all the way to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. What is the difference between being born in 1975 in Belgium and being born in 1975 in Bangladesh? Clearly one of the most fundamental differences is that the Belgian infant is born into an industrial society and the Bangladeshi infant is not. Even the medical setting for the birth itself, not to mention the level of prenatal care available to the expectant mother, is almost certainly vastly more favourable for the Belgian than the Bangladeshi. Childhood nutrition, educational opportunities and life-long standards of living are likely to differ enormously because of the difference between an industrialized and a non-industrialized economy. In such respects current generations are, and future generations probably will be, continuing beneficiaries of earlier industrial activity.

Nothing is wrong with the principle invoked in the third objection. It is indeed not fair to hold someone responsible for what has been done by someone else. Yet that principle is largely irrelevant to the case at hand, because one generation of a rich industrial society is not unrelated to other generations

Global environment and international inequality

537

past and future. All are participants in enduring economic structures. Benefits and costs, and rights and responsibilities, carry across generations.

We turn now to a second, quite different kind of justification of the same mechanism of assigning unequal burdens. This first justification has rested in part upon the unfairness of the existing inequality. The second justification neither assumes nor argues that the initial inequality is unfair.

Greater ability to pay

The second principle of equity is widely accepted as a requirement of simple fairness. It states:

Among a number of parties, all of whom are bound to contribute to some common endeavour, the parties who have the most resources normally should contribute the most to the endeavour.

This principle of paying in accordance with ability to pay, if stated strictly, would specify what is often called a progressive rate of payment: insofar as a party's assets are greater, the rate at which the party should contribute to the enterprise in question also becomes greater. The progressivity can be strictly proportional—those with double the base amount of assets contribute at twice the rate at which those with the base amount contribute, those with triple the base amount of assets contribute at three times the rate at which those with the base amount contribute, and so on. More typically, the progressivity is not strictly proportional—the more a party has, the higher the rate at which it is expected to contribute, but the rate does not increase in strict proportion to increases in assets.

The general principle itself is sufficiently fundamental that it is not necessary, and perhaps not possible, to justify it by deriving it from considerations that are more fundamental still. Nevertheless, it is possible to explain its appeal to some extent more fully. The basic appeal of payment in accordance with ability to pay as a principle of fairness is easiest to see by contrast with a flat rate of contribution, that is, the same rate of contribution by every party irrespective of different parties' differing assets. At first thought, the same rate for everyone seems obviously the fairest imaginable arrangement. What could possibly be fairer, one is initially inclined to think, than absolutely equal treatment for everyone? Surely, it seems, if everyone pays an equal rate, everyone is treated the same and therefore fairly? This, however, is an exceedingly abstract approach, which pays no attention at all to the actual concrete circumstances of the contributing parties. In addition, it focuses exclusively upon the contribution process and ignores the position in which, as a result of the process, the parties end up. Contribution according to ability to pay is much more sensitive both to concrete circumstance and to final outcome.

Suppose that Party A has 90 units of something, Party B has 30 units, and Party C has 9 units. In order to accomplish their missions, it is proposed that everyone should contribute at a flat rate of one-third. This may seem fair in that everyone is treated equally: the same rate is applied to everyone, regardless of circumstances. When it is considered that A's contribution will be 30 and B's will be 10, while C's will be only 3, the flat rate may appear more than fair to C who contributes only one-tenth as much as A does. However, suppose that these units represent \$100 per year in income and that where C lives it is possible to survive on \$750 per year but on no less. If C must contribute 3 units—\$300—he will fall below the minimum for survival. While the flat rate of one-third would require A to contribute far more (\$3,000) than C, and B to contribute considerably more (\$1,000) than C, both A (with \$6,000 left) and B (with \$2,000 left) would remain safely above subsistence level. A and B can afford to contribute at the rate of one-third because they are left with more than enough while C is unable to contribute at that rate and survive.

While flat rates appear misleadingly fair in the abstract, they do so largely because they look at only the first part of the story and ignore how things turn out in the end. The great strength of progressive rates, by contrast, is that they tend to accommodate final outcomes and take account of whether the contributors can in fact afford their respective contributions.

A single objection is usually raised against progressive rates of contribution: disincentive effects. If those who have more are going to lose what they have at a greater rate than those who have less, the incentive to come to have more in the first place will, it is said, be much less than it would have been with a flat rate of contribution. Why should I take more risks, display more imagination, or expend more effort in order to gain more resources if the result will only be that, whenever something must be paid for, I will have to contribute not merely a larger absolute amount (which would happen even with a flat rate) but a larger percentage? I might as well not be productive if much of anything extra I produce will be taken away from me, leaving me little better off than those who produced far less.

Three points need to be noticed regarding this objection. First, of course, being fair and providing incentives are two different matters, and there is certainly no guarantee in the abstract that whatever arrangement would provide the greatest incentives would also be fair.

Second, concerns about incentives often arise when it is assumed that maximum production and limitless growth are the best goal. It is increasingly clear that many current forms of production and growth are unsustainable and that the last thing we should do is to give people self-interested reasons to consume as many resources as they can, even where the resources are consumed productively. These issues cannot be settled in the abstract either, but it is certainly an open question—and one that should be asked very seriously—whether in a particular situation it is desirable to stimulate people by means of incentives to maximum production. Sometimes it is desirable, and sometimes it is not. This is an issue about ends.

Third, there is a question about means. Assuming that it had been demonstrated that the best goal to have in a specific set of circumstances involved stimulating more production of something, one would then have to ask: how much incentive is needed to stimulate that much production? Those who are preoccupied with incentives often speculate groundlessly that unlimited incentives are virtually always required. Certainly it is true that it is generally necessary to provide some additional incentive in order to stimulate additional production. Some people are altruistic and are therefore sometimes willing to contribute more to the welfare of others even if they do not thereby improve their own welfare. It would be completely unrealistic, however, to try to operate an economy on the assumption that people generally would produce more irrespective of whether doing so was in their own interest—they need instead to be provided with some incentive. However, some incentive does not mean unlimited incentive.

It is certainly not necessary to offer unlimited incentives in order to stimulate (limited) additional production by some people (and not others). Whether people respond or not depends upon individual personalities and individual circumstances. It is a factual matter, not something to be decreed in the abstract, how much incentive is enough: for these people in these circumstances to produce this much more, how much incentive is enough? What is clearly mistaken is the frequent assumption that nothing less than the maximum incentive is ever enough.

In conclusion, insofar as the objection based on disincentive effects is intended to be a decisive refutation of the second principle of equity, the objection fails. It is not always a mistake to offer less than the maximum possible incentive, even when the goal of thereby increasing production has itself been justified. There is no evidence that anything less than the maximum is even generally a mistake. Psychological effects must be determined case by case.

On the other hand, the objection based on disincentive effects may be intended—much more modestly—simply as a warning that one of the possible costs of restraining inequalities by means of progressive rates of contribution, in the effort of being fair, may (or may not) be a reduction in incentive effects. As a caution rather than a (failed) refutation, the objection points to one sensible consideration that needs to be taken into account when specifying which variation upon the general second principle of equity is the best version to adopt in a specific case. One would have to consider how much greater the incentive effect would be if the rate of contribution were less progressive, in light of how unfair the results of a less progressive rate would be.

This conclusion that disincentive effects deserve to be considered, although they are not always decisive, partly explains why the second principle of equity is stated, not as an absolute, but as a general principle. It says: '... the parties who have the most resources *normally* should contribute the most...'—not always, but normally. One reason why the rate of contribution might not be progressive, or might not be as progressive as possible, is the potential disincentive

effects of more progressive rates. It would need to be shown case by case that an important goal was served by having some incentive and that the goal in question would not be served by the weaker incentive compatible with a more progressive rate of contribution.

We have so far examined two quite different kinds of justifications of unequal burdens: to reduce or eliminate an existing inequality by removing an unfair advantage of those at the top and to prevent the existing inequality from becoming worse through any infliction of an unfair additional disadvantage upon those at the bottom. The first justification rests in part upon explaining why the initial inequality is unfair and ought to be removed or reduced. The second justification applies irrespective of whether the initial inequality is fair. Now we turn to a different mechanism that—much more directly—serves the second purpose of avoiding making those who are already the worst-off yet worse off.

Guaranteed minimum

We noted earlier that issues of equity or fairness can arise only if there is something that must be divided among different parties. The existence of the following circumstances can be taken as grounds for thinking that certain parties have a legitimate claim to some of the available resources: (a) the aggregate total of resources is sufficient for all parties to have more than enough; (b) some parties do in fact have more than enough, some of them much more than enough; and (c) other parties have less than enough. American philosopher Thomas Nagel has called such circumstances radical inequality.⁴ Such an inequality is radical in part because the total of available resources is so great that there is no need to reduce the best-off people to anywhere near the minimum level in order to bring the worst-off people up to the minimum: the existing degree of inequality is utterly unnecessary and easily reduced, in light of the total resources already at hand. In other words, one could preserve considerable inequality—in order, for instance, to provide incentives, if incentives were needed for some important purpose—while arranging for those with less than enough to have at least enough.

Enough for what? The answer could of course be given in considerable detail, and some of the details would be controversial (and some, although not all, would vary across societies). The basic idea, however, is of enough for a decent chance for a reasonably healthy and active life of more or less normal length, barring tragic accidents and interventions. 'Enough' means the essentials for at

⁴ See Thomas Nagel, 'Poverty and food: why charity is not enough', in Peter G. Brown and Henry Shue, eds, *Food policy: the responsibility of the United States in the life and death choices* (New York: Free Press, 1977), pp. 54–62. In an important recent and synthetic discussion Thomas W. Pogge has suggested adding two further features to the characterization of a radical inequality, as well as a different view about its moral status—see Thomas W. Pogge, 'A global resources dividend', in David A. Crocker and Toby Linden, eds, *Ethics of consumption: the good life, justice and global stewardship*, in the series *Philosophy and the global context* (Lanham, MD, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 501–36. On radical inequality, see pp. 502–503.

least a bit more than mere physical survival—for at least a distinctively human, if modest, life. For example, having enough means owning not merely clothing adequate for substantial protection against the elements but clothing adequate in appearance to avoid embarrassment, by local standards, when being seen in public, as Adam Smith noted.

In a situation of radical inequality—a situation with the three features outlined above—fairness demands that those people with less than enough for a decent human life be provided with enough. This yields the third principle of equity, which states:

When some people have less than enough for a decent human life, other people have far more than enough, and the total resources available are so great that everyone could have at least enough without preventing some people from still retaining considerably more than others have, it is unfair not to guarantee everyone at least an adequate minimum.⁵

Clearly, provisions to guarantee an adequate minimum can be of many different kinds, and, concerning many of the choices, equity has little or nothing to say. The arrangements to provide the minimum can be local, regional, national, international or, more likely, some complex mixture of all, with secondary arrangements at one level providing a backstop for primary arrangements at another level.⁶ Similarly, particular arrangements might assign initial responsibility for maintaining the minimum to families or other intimate groups, to larger voluntary associations like religious groups or to a state bureau. Consideration of equity might have no implications for many of the choices about arrangements, and some of the choices might vary among societies, provided the minimum was in fact guaranteed.

Children, it is worth emphasizing, are the main beneficiaries of this principle of equity. When a family drops below the minimum required to maintain all its members, the children are the most vulnerable. Even if the adults choose to allocate their own share of an insufficient supply to the children, it is still quite likely that the children will have less resistance to disease and less resilience in general. And of course not all adults will sacrifice their own share to their children. Or, in quite a few cultures, adults will sacrifice on behalf of male children but not on behalf of female children. All in all, when essentials are scarce, the proportion of children dying is far greater than their proportion in the population, which in poorer countries is already high—in quite a few poor countries, more than half the population is under the age of 15.

⁵ This third principle of equity is closely related to what I called the argument from vital interests in Henry Shue, 'The unavoidability of justice', in Andrew Hurrell and Benedict Kingsbury, eds, *The international politics of the environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 373–97. It is the satisfaction of vital interests that constitutes the minimum everyone needs to have guaranteed. In the formulation here the connection with limits on inequality is made explicit.

⁶ On the importance of backstop arrangements, or the allocation of default duties, see 'Afterword' in Henry Shue, *Basic rights: subsistence, affluence, and US foreign policy*, 2nd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

One of the most common objections to this third principle of equity flows precisely from this point about the survival of children. It is what might be called the over-population objection. I consider this objection to be ethically outrageous and factually groundless, as explained elsewhere.⁷

The other most common objection is that while it may be only fair for each society to have a guaranteed minimum for its own members, it is not fair to expect members of one society to help to maintain a guarantee of a minimum for members of another society.⁸ This objection sometimes rests on the assumption that state borders—national political boundaries—have so much moral significance that citizens of one state cannot be morally required, even by considerations of elemental fairness, to concern themselves with the welfare of citizens of a different political jurisdiction. A variation on this theme is the contention that across state political boundaries moral mandates can only be negative requirements not to harm and cannot be positive requirements to help. I am unconvinced that, in general, state political borders and national citizenship are markers of such extraordinary and over-riding moral significance. Whatever may be the case in general, this second objection is especially unpersuasive if raised on behalf of citizens of the industrialized wealthy states in the context of international cooperation to deal with environmental problems primarily caused by their own states and of greatest concern in the medium term to those states.

To help to maintain a guarantee of a minimum could mean either of two things: a weaker requirement (a) not to interfere with others' ability to maintain a minimum for themselves; or a stronger requirement (b) to provide assistance to others in maintaining a minimum for themselves. If everyone has a general obligation, even towards strangers in other states and societies, not to inflict harm on other persons, the weaker requirement would follow, provided only that interfering with people's ability to maintain a minimum for themselves counted as a serious harm, as it certainly would seem to. Accordingly, persons with no other bonds to each other would still be obliged not to hinder the others' efforts to provide a minimum for themselves.

One could not, for example, demand as one of the terms of an agreement that someone make sacrifices that would leave the person without necessities. This means that any agreement to cooperate made between people having more than enough and people not having enough cannot justifiably require those who start out without enough to make any sacrifices. Those who lack essentials will still have to agree to act cooperatively, if there is in fact to be cooperation, but they should not bear the costs of even their own cooperation. Because a demand that those lacking essentials should make a sacrifice would harm them, making such a demand is unfair.

⁷ *Basic rights*, ch. 4.

⁸ This objection has recently been provided with a powerful and sophisticated Kantian formulation that deserves much more attention than space here allows—see Richard W. Miller, 'Cosmopolitan respect and patriotic concern', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27: 3, Summer 1998, pp. 202–24.

That (a), the weaker requirement, holds, seems perfectly clear. When, if ever, would (b), the stronger requirement to provide assistance to others in maintaining a minimum for themselves, hold? Consider the case at hand. Wealthy states, which are wealthy in large part because they are operating industrial processes, ask the poor states, which are poor in large part because they have not industrialized, to cooperate in controlling the bad effects of these same industrial processes, like the destruction of atmospheric ozone and the creation of global warming. Assume that the citizens of the wealthy states have no general obligation, which holds prior to and independently of any agreement to work together on environmental problems, to contribute to the provision of a guaranteed minimum for the citizens of the poor states. The citizens of the poor states certainly have no general obligation, which holds prior to and independently of any agreement, to assist the wealthy states in dealing with the environmental problems that the wealthy states' own industrial processes are producing. It may ultimately be in the interest of the poor states to see ozone depletion and global warming stopped, but in the medium term the citizens of the poor states have far more urgent and serious problems—like lack of food, lack of clean drinking water and lack of jobs to provide minimal support for themselves and their families. If the wealthy states say to the poor states, in effect, 'our most urgent request of you is that you act in ways that will avoid worsening the ozone depletion and global warming that we have started', the poor states could reasonably respond, 'our most urgent request of you is assistance in guaranteeing the fulfilment of the essential needs of our citizens'.

In other words, if the wealthy have no general obligation to help the poor, the poor certainly have no general obligation to help the wealthy. If this assumed absence of general obligations means that matters are to be determined by national interest rather than international obligation, then surely the poor states are as fully at liberty to specify their own top priority as the wealthy states are. The poor states are under no general prior obligation to be helpful to the wealthy states in dealing with whatever happens to be the top priority of the wealthy states. This is all the more so as long as the wealthy states remain content to watch hundreds of thousands of children die each year in the poor states for lack of material necessities, which the total resources in the world could remedy many times over. If the wealthy states are content to allow radical inequalities to persist and worsen, it is difficult to see why the poor states should divert their attention from their own worst problems in order to help out with problems that for them are far less immediate and deadly. It is as if I am starving to death, and you want me to agree to stop searching for food and instead to help repair a leak in the roof of your house without your promising me any food. Why should I turn my attention away from my own more severe problem to your less severe one, when I have no guarantee that if I help you with your problem you will help me with mine? If any arrangement would ever be unfair, that one would.

Radical human inequalities cannot be tolerated and ought to be eliminated, irrespective of whether their elimination involves the movement of resources across national political boundaries: resources move across national boundaries all the time for all sorts of reasons. I have not argued here for this judgement about radical inequality, however.⁹ The conclusion for which I have provided a rationale is even more compelling: when radical inequalities exist, it is unfair for people in states with far more than enough to expect people in states with less than enough to turn their attention away from their own problems in order to cooperate with the much better-off in solving their problems (and all the more unfair—in light of the first principle of equity—when the problems that concern the much better-off were created by the much better-off themselves in the very process of becoming as well off as they are). The least that those below the minimum can reasonably demand in reciprocity for their attention to the problems that concern the best-off is that their own most vital problems be attended to: that they be guaranteed means of fulfilling their minimum needs. Any lesser guarantee is too little to be fair, which is to say that any international agreement that attempts to leave radical inequality across national states untouched while asking effort from the worst-off to assist the best-off is grossly unfair.

Overview

I have emphasized that the reasons for the second and third principles of equity are fundamentally the same, namely, avoiding making those who are already the worst-off yet worse off. The second principle serves this end by requiring that when contributions must be made, they should be made more heavily by the better-off, irrespective of whether the existing inequality is justifiable. The third principle serves this end by requiring that no contributions be made by those below the minimum unless they are guaranteed ways to bring themselves up at least to the minimum, which assumes that radical inequalities are unjustified. Together, the second and third principles require that if any contributions to a common effort are to be expected of people whose minimum needs have not been guaranteed so far, guarantees must be provided; and the guarantees must be provided most heavily by the best-off.

The reason for the first principle was different from the reason for the second principle, in that the reason for the first rests on the assumption that an existing inequality is already unjustified. The reason for the third principle rests on the same assumption. The first and third principles apply, however, to inequalities that are, respectively, unjustified for different kinds of reasons. Inequalities to which the first principle applies are unjustified because of how they arose, namely some people have been benefiting unfairly by dumping the costs of their own advances upon other people. Inequalities to which the third principle

⁹ And for the argument to the contrary see Miller, 'Cosmopolitan respect and patriotic concern'.

Global environment and international inequality

545

applies are unjustified independently of how they arose and simply because they are radical, that is, so extreme in circumstances in which it would be very easy to make them less extreme.

What stands out is that in spite of the different content of these three principles of equity, and in spite of the different kinds of grounds upon which they rest, they all converge upon the same practical conclusion: whatever needs to be done by wealthy industrialized states or by poor non-industrialized states about global environmental problems like ozone destruction and global warming, the costs should initially be borne by the wealthy industrialized states.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[27]

ADAPTATION, MITIGATION, AND JUSTICE

Dale Jamieson

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I claim that climate change poses important questions of global justice, both about mitigating the change that is now under way and about adapting to its consequences.¹ I argue for a mixed policy of mitigation and adaptation, and defend one particular approach to mitigation. I also claim that those of us who are rich by global standards and benefit from excess emissions have strenuous duties in our roles as citizens, consumers, producers, and so on to reduce our emissions and to finance adaptation.

THE UNAVOIDABILITY OF ADAPTATION

When I began my research on global climate change in the mid-1980s, it was commonly said that there were three possible responses: prevention, mitigation, and adaptation. Even then we were committed to a substantial climate change, although this was not widely known. This realization began to dawn on many people on June 23, 1988, a sweltering day in Washington, DC, in the middle of a severe national drought, when climate modeler James Hansen testified before a US Senate Committee that it was 99% probable that global warming had begun. Hansen's testimony was front-page news in the

New York Times, and was extensively covered in other media as well. Whether or not Hanson was right, his testimony made clear that we were entering a new world, what Schneider (1989) called "the greenhouse century."

Once it became clear that prevention was no longer possible, mitigation quickly moved to center stage. One week after Hansen's testimony, an international conference in Toronto, convened by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), called for a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2005. In November, the World Congress on Climate and Development, meeting in Hamburg, called for a 30% reduction by 2000. Later that same year, acting on a proposal by the United States, the WMO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in order to assess the relevant scientific information and to formulate response strategies.² In December 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution, proposed by Malta, that essentially authorized the negotiation of a climate change convention. The following year the IPCC published its first report and the International Negotiating Committee (INC) was established. In 1992 the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) was officially opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit. It came into force on March 21, 1994, and by May 24, 2004, had been ratified by 189 countries.

The main objective of the FCCC is to stabilize "greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." This goal is consistent with accepting some degree of climate change so long as it is not "dangerous." In the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the FCCC, all the developed countries except the United States and the Soviet Union favored binding targets and timetables for emissions reductions as a way of reaching this goal. However, in the end the FCCC embodied voluntary commitments on the part of developed countries to return to 1990 levels of GHG emissions by 2000.

It soon became clear that while some European countries might succeed in keeping this commitment, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, and Norway would not. In 1995, at the first Conference of the Parties (COP 1), the "Berlin Mandate" was adopted. The parties pledged that by the end of 1997 an agreement would be reached establishing binding, "quantified, emission limitation reduction objectives" for the industrialized countries, and that no new obligations would be imposed on other countries during the compliance period. In December 1997, the parties agreed to the Kyoto Protocol, which in its broad outlines satisfied the Berlin Mandate. However, many of the most important details regarding the rules of implementation were left for future meetings.

Almost immediately the Kyoto Protocol came under fire from several different directions. It was simultaneously attacked as too weak, too strong, unworkable, and, at least in the United States, politically unacceptable. Meeting in The Hague in November 2000, a lame-duck American administration and its allies, Japan, Russia, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (collectively known as "JUSCAN"), argued that countries should be able to satisfy up to 80% of their reductions by emissions trading and by establishing carbon sinks.³ The Europeans rejected this, and the meeting seemed headed for disaster. However, rather than admitting defeat, the conference was suspended until July 2001. In the interim, in March 2001, the new Bush administration caught the world by surprise by renouncing the Protocol. Ironically, this improved the negotiating position of America's JUSCAN partners. In order to come into force the Protocol had to be ratified by at least 55 countries, including Annex 1 countries responsible for 55% of Annex 1 country emissions in 1990.⁴ Since the U.S. share of such emissions is about 36%, it became imperative to keep the rest of JUSCAN in the Protocol. In addition, some hoped that by offering concessions, the United States could be persuaded to climb down from its extreme position and rejoin the negotiation. The result was that in July 2001, in Bonn, the European Union (EU) acceded to most of the demands that the Americans had made earlier in The Hague. The Protocol was further weakened in Marrakech in November 2001, when negotiators gave in to Russia's demand that its transferable credits for sinks be doubled. After two more years of study and negotiation, Russia finally ratified the Kyoto Protocol on November 18, 2004. On February 16, 2005, the Kyoto Protocol came into force, binding virtually every country in the world except the United States and Australia.

It is not completely clear what will be the effect of the Kyoto Protocol. While once it was envisioned that it would reduce developed country emissions by about 14% between 2000 and 2010, it now appears that in the wake of the Bonn and Marrakech agreements it could countenance as much as a 9% increase in emissions from these countries.⁵ Were that to occur, there would be little difference between the Kyoto path and a "business as usual" scenario, at least with respect to GHG emissions over the next decade.

Essentially what has occurred is that the vague loopholes that were embedded in the text of the Kyoto Protocol, rather than being eliminated, have been quantified and transformed into central features of an emissions control regime. In order to convey the flavor of these loopholes I will mention only the example of Russian "hot air." As a result of the post-communist economic collapse, Russian GHG emissions have sharply declined since

1990. What has happened, in effect, is that Russia is being allowed to sell the rights to emissions that would not have occurred, to countries that will in fact use them. Thus, more GHGs will be emitted than would have been the case under a regime that simply established mandatory emissions limits without such flexible mechanisms as emissions trading and credits for carbon sinks. Russia benefits economically, countries with high levels of GHG emissions are allowed to carry on business more or less as usual, and politicians can take credit for having addressed the problem. Meanwhile, global climate change continues largely unabated.

At the eighth Conference of the Parties (COP 8) meeting in Delhi in October 2002, the United States, once the foremost advocate of bringing developing countries into an emissions control regime, joined with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), India, and China in blocking the attempts of the EU to establish a more inclusive regime after the Kyoto commitments expire in 2012.⁶ At COP 10, meeting in Buenos Aires in December 2004, the United States did everything it could to block even informal discussion of a post-2012 emissions regime. In retrospect, COP 8 may be seen as our entrance into an era in which the world has given up on significantly mitigating climate change, instead embracing a *de facto* policy of “adaptation only.” Indeed, the most public pronouncement of COP 8, the Delhi Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change and Sustainable Development, emphasized adaptation almost to the exclusion of mitigation.

As should be clear already, the climate change discussion has its own vocabulary, and it is important to understand exactly what is meant by such terms as “adaptation.” One influential characterization is this: “...adaptation refers to adjustments in ecological–social–economic systems in response to actual or expected climate stimuli, their effects or impacts.”⁷ Various typologies of adaptation have been developed,⁸ but for the present purposes it is sufficient to mark distinctions on two dimensions.

Some adaptations are conscious responses to climate change while others are not. For example, plans that are currently under way to evacuate low-lying Pacific islands are conscious adaptations, while adaptations by plants, animals and ecosystems, and also those by farmers who incrementally respond to what they see as climate variability and changes in growing season, are nonconscious adaptations. Intuitively, this distinction is between climate change policy adaptations and those responses that are autonomous or automatic. On another dimension, some adaptations are anticipatory while others are reactive. An example of an anticipatory adaptation is constructing seawalls in order to minimize the impact of an expected sea level rise. An

example of a reactive adaptation is the efforts of a coastal community, damaged by a hurricane, to rebuild to a more secure standard. This dimension marks the intuitive distinction between adaptations based on foresight and those that are responses to immediate events. Taking these dimensions together, we can say that climate change adaptations can be driven by policy or by autonomous responses, and they can be based on predictions or stimulated by events.

There are, of course, other dimensions on which one might distinguish adaptations, and the categories that I have characterized admit of degrees of membership. These complications need not concern us for the present purposes, however.⁹

From the beginning of the climate change controversy, some in the research community have been concerned about the place of adaptation on the policy agenda.¹⁰ There were several sources of this concern.

First, the community that studies climate and weather impacts is greatly influenced by the natural hazards community, which has long been committed to the idea that human societies are to a great extent maladapted to their environments. Researchers point to ongoing failures to adapt to such predictable features of a stable climate regime as droughts, storms, and hurricanes. For people who suffer from these events it matters little if they are part of normal variability, associated with various long-term natural cycles, or consequences of anthropogenic climate change. What people experience is weather, not the statistical abstractions constructed by climatologists. An increasing focus on adaptation would help vulnerable people whether or not climate change is occurring.

A second source of concern, often expressed by anthropologists and those influenced by the social movements of the 1960s, is rooted in opposition to scientific, top-down, managerial approaches to human problems. Here the concern is that focusing primarily on mitigation (i.e., reducing GHG emissions) transforms problems of human survival and livelihood into technical problems of "carbon management," best approached by scientists with their formal methods of prediction and their economic approaches to evaluating policy options. With this view, subsistence farmers in the developing world would do better by adjusting and adapting to changing environmental conditions based on their indigenous knowledge than waiting for the right sort of policy to emerge in New York, Geneva, or Washington and then filtering down through a panoply of national institutions, subject to who knows what kinds of distortions and revisions.

In the discussion surrounding the Kyoto Protocol some researchers seemed to suggest that adaptation was a neglected option as a response to

climate change.¹¹ Yet concern for adaptation is both implicit and explicit in the FCCC.¹² The sentence that follows the statement of the objective quoted earlier states that “such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to assure that food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner. Article 4, which specifies the commitments undertaken by the parties to the Convention, mentions adaptation on several occasions. The parties agree to implement national or regional adaptation measures, to cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change, and to take adapting to climate change into account in their relevant social, economic, and environmental policies and actions. In 1994, the IPCC published technical guidelines to assist nations in performing “vulnerability and adaptation assessments,” and in 1995 at COP 1 in Berlin, explicit guidance was provided on adaptation planning and measures. The second IPCC report published in 1996 observed that many societies are poorly adapted to climate, and emphasized the importance of adopting “no-regrets” policies to better adapt to both the prevailing climate regime and what may come next.

More recently, in July 2003, the strategic plan of the United States Government’s Climate Change Science Program listed, as one of its goals, understanding “the sensitivity and adaptability of different natural and managed ecosystems and human systems to climate and related global changes.”¹³ No comparable goal regarding mitigation figured in the plan.

Once it became clear that prevention was not possible, adaptation had to be part of the portfolio of responses. The logic of the U.S. government’s *Climate Action Report 2002* is unassailable: “because of the momentum in the climate system and natural climate variability, adapting to a changing climate is inevitable.”¹⁴ The adaptations may be clumsy, inefficient, inequitable, or inadequate, but it has been clear for some time that human beings and the rest of the biosphere will have to adapt to climate change or they will perish. What is in question is not whether a strategy of adaptation should and will be followed, but whether in addition there will be any serious attempt to mitigate climate change.¹⁵

THE IMPORTANCE OF MITIGATION

My claim is that a policy of adaptation without mitigation, the one we may be slouching toward, runs serious practical and moral risks. The practical risk, which itself has moral dimensions, is that a GHG forcing may quite

suddenly drive the climate system into some unanticipated, radically different state to which it is virtually impossible to adapt. Such a catastrophic climate surprise could occur through climate change setting off a series of positive feedbacks, for example warmer temperatures leading to lower albedo (surface reflectancy), leading to warmer temperatures, leading to lower albedo, and so on – or through the flipping of a climate “switch.” The current climate regime depends on regular circulation systems in the oceans and atmosphere that at various times have turned on, shut down, or been radically different. At the end of the Younger Dryas, about 11,500 years ago, global temperatures rose up to 8°C in a decade and precipitation doubled in about three years.¹⁶ The GHG forcing that is now occurring increases the probability of such an abrupt change. As a recent report from the National Academy of Sciences (2002, p. 107) states,

In a chaotic system, such as the earth’s climate, an abrupt change could always occur. However, existence of a forcing greatly increases the number of possible mechanisms. Furthermore, the more rapid the forcing, the more likely it is that the resulting change will be abrupt on the time scale of human economies or global ecosystems.

Indeed, there is some evidence that abrupt changes may already be occurring. The Arctic circulation appears to be slowing,¹⁷ and since the 1980s the Arctic Oscillation has been stuck in its positive phase, causing lower pressures to persist over the Arctic. This has led to warmer summers and stormier springs, resulting in the greatest contraction of Arctic sea ice since modern measurements began, and perhaps much longer if anecdotal and anthropological reports are to be believed.¹⁸ The recent Arctic Climate Impact Assessment sponsored by the Arctic Council, a high-level intergovernmental forum that includes the United States, found that the warming in the Arctic is much more extreme than that in the mid-latitudes, with some Arctic regions having warmed 10 times as much as the mid-latitude average.¹⁹ Perhaps most telling, in the summer of 2000 a Canadian ship succeeded in transiting the legendary, once impassable Northwest Passage, the elusive goal of mariners since the 16th century.

Even without abrupt climate change, an “adaptation only” policy runs serious moral risks. For such a policy is likely to be an application of the “polluted pay” principle, rather than the “polluter pays” principle. Some of the victims of climate change will be driven to extinction (e.g., some small island states and endangered species), and others will bear the costs of their own victimization (e.g., those who suffer from more frequent and extreme climate-related disasters).

Consider what happens when a climate-related disaster strikes a developing country. Often large amounts of aid are pledged and commitments are made to provide both humanitarian assistance and support for transforming the society in order to reduce its vulnerability to future disasters, but little meaningful change actually occurs. Consider an example.²⁰

In 1998 Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras, killing at least 6,500 people and causing \$2–4 billion in damage, an amount equivalent to 15%–30% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). At the height of the emergency, donors pledged \$72 million to the World Food Program for immediate humanitarian assistance. More than a year later, less than one-third of the promised funds had been delivered. At a donors' conference convened in Stockholm in 1999, \$9 billion was pledged for the reconstruction and transformation of Central America. The conference report stated that "the tragedy of Hurricane Mitch provided a unique opportunity to rebuild not the same, but a better Central America."²¹ Many of the resources that were provided were reprogrammed funds or "in kind" contributions. Much of the promised aid was not delivered in any form. Still, a significant amount of aid did find its way into the country, especially compared to pre-Mitch levels of assistance.

The 3-year reconstruction period is now over, and we can ask what has been accomplished. There are success stories trumpeted by various governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and it would be incorrect to say that no improvements have been made. Still, Honduras remains extremely poor and vulnerable to climate-related disasters. One observer writes that even

...after Mitch, we see many environmentally bad habits on replay. People are moving back into high-risk zones, farming practices degrade upper watersheds, illegal logging damages forests, trash dumping and sediment stop up storm drains (50 percent are out of order...), new buildings weaken river channels; lack of educational campaigns, poor emergency readiness, forest burning.²²

Tragically, we have lived through this story before. In 1974, Hurricane Fifi swept through Honduras, killing about 8,000 people and causing about \$1 billion in damages. Shortly after this event, studies showed that the destruction was exacerbated by various social, economic, and political conditions. These included deforestation, as well as the displacement of campesinos into isolated valleys and on to steep hillsides by foreign-owned banana plantations and large-scale beef ranches. After Hurricane Mitch, studies again implicated these same factors. The report of the 1999 donors' conference states that the tragedy "was magnified by man-made decisions

due to poverty that led to chaotic urbanization and soil degradation.”²³ This cycle of vulnerability is made vivid by the following description:

On the North Coast, the Aguan River flooded big after Fifi. It is a closed basin and dumps huge amounts of water straight into the ocean. Not only did the same flooding occur with Mitch, but it carried the village of Santa Rosa de Aguan out to sea, drowning dozens. There was no effort in the headwaters to do something to avoid this repeat catastrophe.²⁴

What I am suggesting is that the moral risk of a policy of “adaptation only” is that it will hit the poor the hardest, yet it is they who have done the least to bring about climate change. They will suffer the worst impacts and they have the least resources for adaptation.

Some people would deny that the poor are most vulnerable, pointing to the long history of mutual accommodation between indigenous peoples and their environments. However, underdevelopment is not the same as lack of development. In some regions of the world people are less able to feed themselves and to manage their environments than they were in the distant past.²⁵ In some cases contact with the Northern-dominated global economy has brought the risks of capitalism without the benefits. Traditional ways of coping have been lost or driven out, while modern approaches are not available. From this perspective underdevelopment should be thought of as something that has been produced by the global economy rather than as some point of origination from which development proceeds. This, however, is not to endorse any “myth of merry Africa” in which all was paradisiacal before European contact. No doubt, in many regions “capitalist scarcity [has simply] replaced precapitalist famine.”²⁶

Whatever is true about the details of these speculations, it is clear that poor countries will suffer most from climate change just as poor countries suffer most today from climate variability and extreme events. Honduras suffers more from hurricanes than Costa Rica, Ethiopia suffers more from drought than the United States, and probably no country is more affected by floods than Bangladesh. In 1998, 68% of Bangladesh’s land mass was flooded, affecting about 30 million people, and this was only one of seven major floods that occurred over a 25-year period. Generally, 96% of disaster-related deaths in recent years have occurred in developing countries.²⁷

The vulnerability of poor countries to climate change has been widely recognized in international reports and declarations, including the most recent IPCC report.²⁸ The Johannesburg Declaration, issued on the 10th anniversary of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, declared that “the adverse effects of climate change are already evident, natural disasters are more

frequent and more devastating and developing countries more vulnerable.”²⁹ The Delhi Declaration, cited earlier, expressed concern at the vulnerability of developing countries, especially the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and identified Africa as the region suffering most from the synergistic effects of climate change and poverty.

One response to the fact that it is the poor countries which will suffer most from climate change would be to internationalize the costs of adaptation. This is favored by many of those in the research community who have championed adaptation and was also envisioned in Article 4.4 of the FCCC, which commits developed countries to “assist the developing country Parties that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in meeting costs of adaptation to those adverse effects.”

Discussions about providing such assistance did not begin until COP 1 in Berlin in 1995, and only recently have begun to move to the center stage. The 2001 Marrakech Accords established three new funds to assist developing countries with adaptation. The Least Developed Countries Fund supports the development of adaptation action plans. The Special Climate Change Fund assists all developing countries (not only the LDCs) with adaptation projects and technology transfer. The Kyoto Protocol Adaptation Fund finances concrete adaptation projects and programs. The latter fund is resourced by an adaptation levy placed on transactions under the Clean Development Mechanism, the program under which greenhouse gas reductions are traded between companies in the developed and developing world. The other two funds are supported by voluntary contributions. Canada and Ireland have committed \$10 million to the Less Developed Country Fund, and various nations have pledged to contribute a total of \$450 million per year to the Special Climate Change Fund. These funds were supposed to begin operation in 2005, but they were stalled at the COP 10 meeting in December 2004, in part due to demands by Saudi Arabia that it receive compensation if the world turns away from the use of fossil fuels.

While I am in favor of establishing these funds, many practical problems must be overcome before significant resources are invested, and even on the most optimistic scenarios there are clear limitations on what these funds can accomplish.³⁰ Parry, et al. (2001) have shown that on “business as usual” emissions scenarios, hundreds of millions of additional people will be at risk from hunger, malaria, flooding, and water shortages. Economists standardly estimate the damages of climate change on such scenarios at 1.5–2% of GDP.³¹ This implies damages of between \$705 and \$940 billion per year in current dollars once the full impacts of climate change are felt. The damages

from sea level rise alone have been estimated at \$2 trillion over the next 50 years.³² Although more than half of global GDP is in the developed countries, the damages of climate change are likely to be significantly higher than 2% of GDP in the LDCs.

These numbers have an air of unreality about them, and the cost of adaptation would presumably be less than the damages that climate change would entail. Still, even if the Marrakech mechanisms were fully funded, it seems quite unlikely that they would begin to approach the level of resources required to fully finance adaptation to climate change in the poor countries. Moreover, even if these mechanisms would significantly defray the costs of adaptation for the poor, another injustice would be entailed. The United States is the largest emitter of GHGs; yet it is outside the Kyoto framework, thus not a contributor to the funds established by that agreement. It is difficult to see any system as just in which the world's largest emitter of GHGs does nothing to pay for the damages it causes.

Even more troubling than the fact that poor countries suffer more from climate-related impacts than rich countries is the fact that poor people suffer more from such impacts than rich people, wherever they live. The disproportionate impact on the poor was specifically cited in the donors' report on Hurricane Mitch, but this pattern of the poor suffering most from extreme climatic events has been documented as far back as the "little ice age" that occurred in Europe from 1300 to 1850.³³

A recent example is the Chicago heat wave of July 14–20, 1995. In a fascinating book, Klineberg (2002) documents in detail the victims of this event; they were disproportionately low-income, elderly, African-American males living in violence-prone parts of the city. A total of 739 people died in the heat wave, more than four times as many as in the Oklahoma City bombing that occurred three months earlier although it received much less media attention. This pattern of the poor suffering disproportionately from climate-related impacts, even in rich countries, occurred once again in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast of the United States in September 2005. As I write these words the damages have not yet been assessed, but it is clear that they are quite catastrophic.

Poor people suffer more than do rich people from climate-related impacts, wherever they live, but poor people in poor countries suffer most of all. A recent report from a consortium of international organizations concluded that

climate change will compound existing poverty. Its adverse impacts will be most striking in the developing nations because of their geographical and climatic conditions, their high dependence on natural resources, and their limited capacity to adapt to a changing

climate. Within these countries, the poorest, who have the least resources and the least capacity to adapt, are the most vulnerable.³⁴

This conclusion should not be surprising since the poor suffer more from “normal” conditions, and often only need a good shove to plunge into catastrophe.

Climate change and variability have enormous and increasing impacts on developing countries, yet very little has been done to integrate these considerations with overall development objectives. At the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, the worlds’ governments committed themselves to eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the achievement of which is supposed to result in a 50% reduction in global poverty by 2015. Despite the fact that one of these goals is “ensuring environmental sustainability,” the MDGs make no mention of climate change or climate-related disasters as threats to environmental sustainability or to the overall goal of poverty reduction. Yet the report from the African Development Bank et al. (2003) quoted earlier states that “climate change is a serious threat to poverty reduction and threatens to undo decades of development effort.” A similar conclusion was reached in a recent review of the United Nations International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which stated that “millennium development targets cannot be reached unless the heavy human and economic toll of disasters is reduced.”³⁵ It is clear that climate change and variability should be thought of not only as environmental problems, but also as major influences on the development process itself.³⁶

These claims are borne out by a brief look at some examples. Climate change is expected to increase the incidence of malaria in some regions. While malaria is a human health problem, it is also an obstacle to development. Gallup and Sachs (2000) found that between 1965 and 1990, a high incidence of malaria was associated with low economic growth rates and that a 10% reduction in malaria was associated with a 0.3% increase in economic growth. Freeman, Martin, Mechler, Warner, and Hausmann (2002) showed that in Central America over the next decade, exposure to natural disasters could shrink a growth rate of 5–6% per year to one that is virtually flat. This would have the effect of consigning millions to poverty which they might otherwise escape.

It is the poor who suffer most from climate-related disasters, and in the end they are largely on their own. International assistance is typically inadequate, and many of the changes required to reduce vulnerability can be made only by affected communities themselves in conjunction with their governments. In turn local, regional, and national decision-makers are often

constrained by the economic and political realities of the global order. There is little reason to expect this pattern to shift as a changing climate increasingly makes itself felt in climate-related disasters.

Grand proposals have been made for addressing these problems. For example, Senator Al Gore (1992) proposed a "Global Marshall Plan" aimed at "heal[ing] the global environment." Even if there were popular support for such proposals, there would not be much reason to be optimistic. Rich countries, perhaps especially the United States, have the political equivalent of attention deficit disorder. A "Global Marshall Plan," or even a conscientious effort to finance adaptation to climate change on a global scale, would require a level of sustained commitment that most Western societies seem incapable of maintaining, especially now when the war on terrorism presents similar challenges and is perceived as much more urgent. Indeed, if we had the moral and political resources to internationalize adaptation and distribute the costs fairly, it seems likely that the attempt to control emissions would succeed and we could effectively mitigate the effects of climate change. A just approach to adaptation is not really an alternative to a just approach to mitigation, since it would mobilize the same resources of respect and reciprocity. Just as we must acknowledge the necessity of adaptation, so a just approach to climate change cannot escape the challenge of mitigation.³⁷

Mitigating climate change by reducing GHG emissions is important for a number of reasons. First, slowing down the rate of change allows humans and the rest of the biosphere time to adapt, and reduces the threat of catastrophic surprises.³⁸ Second, mitigation, if carried out properly, holds those who have done the most to produce climate change responsible, at least to some extent, for their actions. It is a form of moral education. As President Bush has said in other contexts, it is important for actions to have consequences. As I have said, mitigation as envisioned by the FCCC embodies aspects of the "polluter pays" principle. By bearing some costs to reduce GHG emissions, those who have been most instrumental in causing climate change bear some of the burdens. An exclusive focus on adaptation is an instance of the "polluted pays" principle. Those who suffer from climate change bear the costs of coping with it.³⁹

MITIGATION: A MODEST PROPOSAL

There are various mitigation schemes that could plausibly be seen as both just and economically efficient, including what I have elsewhere called a

“modest proposal.”⁴⁰ The proposal is modest in that it conjoins two ideas that are very much alive in the policy world, each of which has influential supporters. However, the conjunction of these ideas has not been forcefully advocated because those who support one conjunct typically oppose the other. Still, the elements of the proposal have been discussed by a number of authors in varying degrees of detail.⁴¹

The United States government, especially during the Clinton administration, made a very strong case for the idea that a GHG mitigation regime should be efficient, and that emissions trading is a powerful instrument for realizing efficiency.⁴² Developing countries, led by India, have convincingly argued that a GHG mitigation regime must be fair, and that fairness recognizes that the citizens of the world have equal rights to the atmosphere.⁴³ In my view both the United States and the developing countries have a point. The emphasis on efficiency promoted by the United States is potentially good for the world as a whole. The emphasis on equality promoted by the developing countries seems to me to be morally unassailable. The challenge is to construct a fair system of emissions trading.⁴⁴

The main problem with emissions trading as it is developing is that not enough thought is being given to what might be called the end game and the start game: the total global emissions that we should permit and how permissions to emit should be allocated. I propose that we give the Americans what they want: an unrestricted market in permits to emit GHGs, but that we distribute these permits according to some plausible principle of justice.

What would be such a principle? I can think of the following general possibilities.

1. Distribute permissions on a per capita basis.
2. Distribute permissions on the basis of productivity.
3. Distribute permissions on the basis of existing emissions.
4. Distribute permissions on the basis of some other principle.
5. Distribute permissions on the basis of some combination of these principles.

Principles 4 and 5 are principles of last resort,⁴⁵ and Principle 3 is implausible. The existing pattern of emissions primarily reflects temporal priority in the development process, rather than any moral entitlement. In general, it is hard to see why temporal priority in exploiting a commons should generate any presumptive claim to continue the exploitation. Suppose that I started grazing a large herd of cows on some land that we own together before you were able to afford any cows of your own. Now that you have a few cows you want to graze them on our land. But if you do,

some of my cows will have to be taken off the land and as a result I will be slightly less rich. Therefore, I demand compensation. Surely you would be right in saying that since we own the land in common you have a right to your fair share. The fact that you haven't been able to exercise that right does not mean that you forfeited it.

Principle 2 has a point. Surely we would not want to allocate emissions permissions toward unproductive uses. If the world can only stand so many GHG emissions, then we have an interest in seeing that they are allocated toward efficient uses.⁴⁶ But what this point bears on is how emissions should be allocated, not on how emissions permissions should initially be distributed. Markets will allocate permissions towards beneficial uses. But it is hard to see why those who are in a position to make the most productive use of GHGs should therefore have the right to emit them for free. This is certainly not a principle that we would accept in any domestic economy. Perhaps, if you owned my land, you would use it more productively than I do. For this reason you have an incentive to buy my land, but this does not warrant your getting it for free.

In my opinion the most plausible distributive principle is one that simply asserts that every person has a right to the same level of GHG emissions as every other person. It is hard to see why being American or Australian gives someone a right to more emissions, or why being Brazilian or Chinese gives someone less of a right. The problem with this proposal is that it provides an incentive for pro-natalist policies. A nation can generate more permissions to emit simply by generating more people. But this problem is easily addressed. For other purposes the FCCC has recognized the importance of establishing baseline years. There is no magic in 1990 as the reference year for emission reductions. But if 1990 is a good year for that purpose, let us just say that every nation should be granted equal per capita emissions permissions, indexed to its 1990 population. If you do not like 1990, however, then index to another year. It is important to my proposal that per capita emissions be indexed to some year, but exactly which year is open to negotiation.⁴⁷

Three problems (at least) remain. First, in indexing emissions to 1990 populations I am in effect giving the developed countries their historical emissions for free. But don't the same considerations that suggest that everyone who was alive in 1990 should have equal permissions, apply to everyone who has ever lived? There is some force to this objection. But knowledge of the consequences of GHG emissions does to some extent seem morally relevant. Suppose that when my mother grazed her cows on our common property, the world was very different. Neither of us thought of

what we were doing as eroding common property. Indeed, neither of us thought of the area on which the cows were grazing as property at all. I benefited from the activities of my mother, but neither your mother nor mine was aware of any harm being produced. If my mother had been cleverer perhaps she would have asked your mother for the exclusive right to graze cows on this piece of land. Perhaps your mother would have acceded because she had no cows and didn't think of land – much less this land – as property (much less as her property). Suppose that I say that since we now have different understandings, I'm going to set matters right, and that from this point on you have an equal right to graze cows on our land. I acknowledge that if I am to graze more cows than you I will have to buy the right.

I think many people would say that I have done enough by changing my behavior in the light of present knowledge. Perhaps others would say that there is still some sort of unacknowledged debt that I owe you because of the benefits I reaped from my mother's behavior.⁴⁸ But what I think is not plausible to say is that what my mother did in her ignorance is morally equivalent to my denying your right to use our land to the same extent that I do. For this reason I don't think that historical emissions should be treated in the same way as present and future emissions. The results of historical emissions are also so much a part of the fabric of the world that we now presuppose that it is difficult to turn the clock back. At a practical level, countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States have had a difficult time determining what compensation they owe their indigenous peoples. Determining the effects of unequal appropriation of the atmosphere through history would be even more difficult.

The second problem is that some would insist that it matters where GHG emissions occur, not because of their impact on climate, but because of their effects on quality of life. A high quality of life, it is argued, is associated with high levels of GHG emissions. What this objection brings out is that a bad market in emissions permissions would be worse than no market at all. In a properly functioning market, nations would only sell their emissions permissions if the value of the offer was worth more to them than the permission to emit. But while no international market in emissions permissions could be expected to run perfectly, there is no reason to think that such a market cannot run well enough to improve the welfare of both buyers and sellers.

This leads to the problems of monitoring, enforcement, and compliance. These are difficult problems for any climate regime. Perhaps they are more difficult for the regime that I suggest than for others, but I think that it is

clear that any meaningful emissions control will require a vast improvement in these areas.⁴⁹

The scheme that I suggest has many advantages. It would stabilize emissions in a way that would be both efficient and fair. It would also entail a net transfer of resources from developed to developing countries, thus reducing global inequality.

AGENTS AND BENEFICIARIES

Thus far I have argued that it is important to mitigate climate change both in order to reduce the risks of a climate surprise and because a policy that involves mitigation is more likely to distribute the costs fairly than a policy of "adaptation only." I have also briefly sketched and defended one approach to mitigation that is both fair and efficient. However, it is one thing to say how the world ought to be and it is another to give an account of whose responsibility it is to bring that world about. When it comes to the specification of moral agents and beneficiaries at the global scale, there are three important models in play.⁵⁰

The first model is the familiar one of state sovereignty that goes back at least to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. This model sees states as morally decisive over their own people, and the international order as constructed from agreements or conquests among these sovereigns. In this view states are both the agents and beneficiaries of any duties that might exist to address climate change. While this view continues to have strong advocates, in a world in which people and states are tied together by a single environment, a globalized economy, and common threats, this model seems less plausible than it once did.⁵¹ Indeed, it is rejected both by those who seek to establish a global order based on human rights and environmental protection, and by those who want to establish the hegemony of a single power based on its unique commitment to some set of preferred values.⁵²

A second model, the sovereignty of peoples, has been developed by Rawls (1999), arguably the leading political theorist of the 20th century. Rawls characterizes a people as having the following three features: a reasonably just government that serves its interests in various ways, including protecting its territory; a common culture, usually in virtue of speaking the same language and sharing historical memories; and finally, having a moral conception of right and justice that is not unreasonable. A society of peoples is established when decent peoples agree to adopt the law of peoples, codified in eight principles that express a commitment to keep agreements and to

honor human rights, and to go to war only in self-defense and then to abide by the laws of war.

While Rawls is a liberal and his account of the law of peoples is sometimes called "a theory of liberal sovereignty," he specifically rejects the idea that a theory of distributive justice applies globally. The main reason for this is that the purpose of the negotiation that leads to the establishing of the law of peoples is to arrive at "fair terms of political cooperation with other peoples."⁵³ Representatives of peoples would accept duties to contribute to the welfare of other peoples, but they would only be instrumental to the larger purpose of assisting other peoples to play their proper role in the society of peoples. Either as peoples or individuals we do not, according to Rawls, have direct duties to the individuals who constitute other peoples.

Rawls's distinction between peoples and states is central to his view; yet it is difficult to maintain. "Peoples," insofar as this concept is well defined, seem suspiciously state-like. One way that peoples are supposed to be importantly different from states is that, unlike states as traditionally conceived, peoples can only wage defensive wars and must honor human rights. However, these features do not clearly distinguish states from peoples, since they can be seen as moral restrictions on the sovereignty of states rather than as indicating a change of subject from states to peoples. If peoples are not states, then it is unclear what they are or whether they behave coherently enough to star in a theory of international justice.

Rawls speaks as if peoples are well-defined, self-contained, and as if they map on to territories and the Law of the Excluded Middle applies to membership in them. None of this is true. We need only to contemplate the claims of Palestinians, Kurds, or Orthodox Jews, or consider various national laws that attempt to legislate a people's identity in order to see that the very attempt to define a people is a problematical and highly political act. The fact that peoples are not self-contained and do not map on to specific territories is evidenced by several recent wars, notably in the Balkans. That the Law of the Excluded Middle does not apply to membership in a people can be seen by Mexican-Americans, Irish-Americans, or any number of other claimed, hyphenated identities. Indeed, individuals may shift their identities, depending on their purposes.⁵⁴ These considerations suggest that either Rawls's law of peoples is at heart a "morality of states," which he denies, or it is founded on a vague and unstable concept.

One particularly objectionable feature of Rawls's views is that because he thinks of peoples as normally occupying territories, he invests national boundaries with a moral significance that they do not have.⁵⁵ It is unjust, if anything is, that a person's life prospects should turn on which side of a

river she is born, or where exactly an imaginary line was drawn decades ago by a colonial power. But for Rawls, there is nothing morally objectionable about the arbitrariness of borders or the differential life-prospects that they may engender. When a pregnant woman in Baja California (Mexico) illegally crosses the border to San Diego, California (United States) so that her child will be born an American citizen with all the advantages that brings, there is for Rawls nothing troubling about the circumstances that motivate her action. Peoples have the right to control the borders of their own territories, but how can we fault a woman for doing what she thinks is best for her child?⁵⁶

Problems such as these lead people to embrace a third view, “cosmopolitanism,” which holds that it is individual people who are the primary agents and beneficiaries of duties.⁵⁷ In this view duties, including duties of distributive justice, project across national boundaries, connecting individuals with each other, regardless of citizenship and residency.

While there are real differences between Rawls and his cosmopolitan critics, I believe that they can be brought closer together than one might think. Perhaps we can begin to see this when we realize that Rawls and his critics are to some extent motivated by different concerns. Cosmopolitans are concerned with what we might call moral or social “ontology.” They insist that it is individual people who are the fundamental grounds of moral concern, not collectives or abstractions such as peoples or nations. Rawls is concerned with the question of how peoples with different views of the good can cooperate fairly with each other, and move together toward a peaceful future in which human rights prevail.⁵⁸ From the perspective of a person in a developing country who is being provided with a micro-loan (for example), it makes little difference whether she is being aided because she is the direct beneficiary of a moral obligation, or because the people of which she is a part is being aided so that it can become part of the society of peoples.⁵⁹

Rather than adjudicating between these views, I want to offer another perspective. We do not have to choose between being individuals who have duties to other individuals, or being members of a people which owes duties to other peoples. Both are true, and more besides. We are parents, students, members of NGOs, Irish-Americans, Muslims, citizens of towns and states, stockholders, consumers, patrons of the arts, sports fans, home-owners, commuters, and so on. We occupy multiple roles that have different responsibilities and causal powers attached to them. It is from these roles and powers that duties flow.

For example, I may have duties to reduce my consumption of energy, encourage my acquaintances to do the same, join organizations and support

candidates that support climate stabilization policies, disinvest in Exxon, support NGOs and projects in developing countries that assist people in adapting to climate change, and contribute to organizations that protect nonhuman nature. Exactly what duties I have depends on many factors including my ability to make a difference, how these duties compete with other moral demands, and so on. In the picture that I am urging, our duties form a dense web that crosses both institutional and political boundaries. We do not have to choose between accounts that privilege particular levels of analysis.⁶⁰

A full account would have to explain exactly how the clear, urgent duties relating to adaptation and mitigation that I have described map on to us as individuals in the various roles that we occupy. Indeed, it is here where much of the slippage occurs between the abstract recognition of what ought to be done and what I am motivated to do. In fact, a kind of “shadow” collective action problem can break out within each of us. I may agree that as a consumer I am responsible for intolerable amounts of GHGs, yet it may be very difficult to disaggregate this responsibility to me in my various roles as father, teacher, little league baseball coach, and so on. Many questions remain, but my central claim is clear: We have strenuous duties to address the problem of climate change, and they attach to us in our various roles and relationships.

OBJECTIONS

The simplest objection to what I have said would involve denying that there are any such things as duties that transcend national boundaries.⁶¹ Whatever plausibility such a claim might have would rest on supposing that it is neutral in applying to all countries and their citizens equally. For example, this claim would imply both that Americans have no duties to Sierra Leoneans and that Sierra Leoneans have no duties to Americans. However, while this claim may be formally neutral it certainly is not substantively neutral.⁶² Americans, acting both as individuals and through their institutions, can greatly influence the welfare of the citizens of Sierra Leone, but Sierra Leoneans are virtually powerless to influence the welfare of Americans. Thus, the apparently reciprocal nature of the duties involved can easily be seen as a mere charade.⁶³

However, it is easy to see why in the past some may have thought that duties do not transcend national boundaries. Famines and other disasters have occurred throughout history, but in many cases it was not known

outside the affected regions that people were dying. Even when it was known and people were willing to provide assistance, little could be done to help those in need. When people are not culpably ignorant and they are not in a position to be efficacious, there is little point in ascribing duties to them. But today things are very different with respect to information and causal efficacy. We live in an age in which national boundaries are porous with respect to almost everything of importance: people, power, money, and information, to mention a few. These help to make obligations possible. If people, power, money, and information are so transnational in their movements, it is hard to believe that duties and obligations are confined by borders.⁶⁴ The view that duties do not transcend national boundaries (unlike lawyers, guns, and money – not to mention drugs and immigrants) is really equivalent to denying people in the developing world a place at the table. It is the global equivalent of the domestic denial of rights to women and minority populations.

While most philosophers and theorists these days would not challenge the very existence of transnational duties, some would hold that there are very few such duties and that they are comparatively weak. Such a view is sometimes expressed by granting the existence of transnational duties but denying that they are duties of justice. There are two distinct grounds for such a view.

The first ground, which is broadly based in the tradition of the 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, is based on denying that there is any such thing as “natural justice.” On this view justice is entirely a matter of convention: Justice consists in conforming to enforceable agreements; injustice consists in violating them. Since there is little by way of enforceable, international agreements, there are few transnational duties.

The second ground for such a view is based on a Communitarian account of justice. While this view may grant that enforceable agreements across communities can generate duties of justice, it holds that such duties typically arise within, rather than among, communities, and do not require explicit agreements. Since the world is characterized by a plurality of communities rather than by a single global community, the necessary condition for a dense network of transnational duties of justice is not satisfied. Thus, Communitarians come to the same conclusion as Hobbesians: there is little ground for supposing that there is a panoply of transnational duties of justice.⁶⁵

I will not mount a systematic refutation of these views here but instead restrict myself to a single observation about the view that while transnational duties may exist, they are not duties of justice. As I have indicated,

there are different grounds for such a denial. Such a denial may rest on the view that some transnational duties are distinct from duties of justice because they do not originate in agreement, are not owed to specific beneficiaries, or are less urgent than duties of justice. What I want to insist on is that there are urgent duties to respond to climate change, that those of us who are part of the global middle class contribute significantly to causing the problem, and that we can identify generally those who will suffer from our actions.⁶⁶ If this much is granted, then I am not sure that anything of significance turns on either asserting or denying that the duties in question are duties of justice.⁶⁷

The second objection has been raised most consistently and forcefully by Schelling (1992, 1997, 2000), who argues in the following way. Suppose that it is true that we have duties to improve the welfare of those who are worse (or worst) off. There are other, more efficient and efficacious, ways of doing this than by reducing our GHG emissions. For example, we could invest in clean water systems, vaccinations, literacy programs, and so on. Or we could simply give money to those who are worse off. Schelling concludes that

it would be hard to make the case that the countries we now perceive as vulnerable would be better off 50 or 75 years from now if 10 or 20 trillions of dollars had been invested in carbon abatement rather than economic development.⁶⁸

While this objection has some force, plausible responses can be given.

First, for any actual transfer from the rich to the poor, there is likely to be another possible transfer that is more beneficial. However, this does not imply that every such transfer we make is wrong, irrational, or ill-advised. This is because the alternative policies we choose between are not all those that are logically or physically possible, but those that have some reasonable chance of actually being implemented. Some of our duties with respect to climate change have a reasonable chance of being implemented because they involve controlling our own behavior or taking action in a democratic society. Even if the results of our discharging these duties were not optimal relative to the set of logically or physically possible actions that we might perform, their consequences would be very good indeed and this is sufficient for making it at least morally permissible to carry them out.⁶⁹

Furthermore, the duty to mitigate climate change does not depend on some general duty to benefit the worse (or worst) off. Such a principle might generate this duty, but so would more modest principles that require us to refrain from imposing serious risks on others. Indeed, the modesty of the principles required to ground such duties is part of what makes action on

climate change both possible and urgent, despite the obstacles hindering such action.⁷⁰

Finally, transferring resources to the worse (worst) off rather than mitigating our carbon emissions would do nothing to reduce the risk of catastrophic climate change. Nor would it provide comfort to those morally considerable aspects of nature that are vulnerable to climate change. There is no guarantee that transforming the poor into the rich would in itself protect environmental values, such as respect for what is wild and natural, that are at the heart of many people's concern about climate change.

For these reasons, despite the power of Schelling's objection, the idea that we have a duty to mitigate climate change is not defeated.

THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVATION

Even if what I have said is correct, a problem may linger. Morality is fundamentally directed toward action. Many would say that it seems clear that we are not motivated to address this problem. What is the point of seeing climate change as posing moral questions if we are not motivated to act? To this I have four related responses.

First, outside the United States, especially in Europe and the developing world, the problem of climate change is widely seen as a moral issue. Much of the anger at the American withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol can only be understood by appreciating this fact. Seeing climate change as posing moral questions is part of appreciating others' points of view. Of course, having appreciated how climate change can be viewed in this way, we are free to reject this perspective. However, I believe that once we appreciate climate change as a moral problem, this view is virtually irresistible.⁷¹

Moreover, rejecting the moral framing of the climate change problem and instead approaching it from the perspective of self-interest does not lead to solutions. Although I think we could get further on this ground than we have gotten thus far, ultimately acting on the basis of narrow self-interest locks us into collective action problems that lead to worse outcomes overall. This is borne out by the current state of climate change negotiations and also helps explain why we as individuals often feel so powerless in the face of this problem.⁷²

Third, a moral response to climate change is difficult to escape. For the challenge of climate change is not only global and abstract, but also local and intimate. Once obligations are seen in the way described in the previous section – as forming a dense web of connections that link us in our myriad

roles and identities to people all over the world – then it becomes clear that virtually everything we do is morally valenced. When we bike instead of drive or donate money to Oxfam, we issue moral responses to the problem of climate change. Denying responsibility, dissembling, and ignoring the problem are themselves moral responses.

Finally, I think that it is a plain fact that climate change poses moral questions. While I do not want to argue in detail here about the concept of morality or defend the idea that there is a simple and direct relation between grasping the way the world is and being motivated to act, surely there is some connection between seeing an act as morally right and performing it. That something is the morally right thing to do is a powerful consideration in its favor. It may not always carry the day, but it cannot easily be ignored.

Taken together, these considerations go some way toward demonstrating the utility of viewing climate change as a moral problem.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are some reasons to be hopeful that the global community is beginning to wake up to the problem of climate change. The Kyoto Protocol came into effect in 2005, and the European Union is eager to take more aggressive action after 2012, when the first Kyoto commitment period expires. American corporations that do business outside the United States will be governed by the Kyoto system, and many are increasingly receptive to the idea of a single global system for managing GHG emissions. Even the northeastern states and California, largely ruled by Republican governors, are moving toward adopting their own GHG emissions policies. Meanwhile, the Inuit peoples are preparing a case to present to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, charging that the United States is threatening their existence through its contributions to global warming.

Despite these signs of hope, climate change is a scientifically complex issue that is difficult to address effectively and, in the United States at least, politicians can safely ignore this issue without fear of punishment. It is in part another victim of the war on terrorism. While climate change may be far from the public mind, GHGs continue to build up in the atmosphere, and the risks of climate change continue to magnify. When it comes to responding to fundamental changes in the systems that control life on Earth, denial, distortion, and spin are not viable long-term strategies.⁷³ Eventually, concern about climate change will emerge as an important public issue, and a movement toward creating a law of the atmosphere will gain momentum.

In the meantime it is important to recognize that those who suffer from extreme climatic events are often the victims of greed, indifference, and mendacity. It is human beings and their societies that are largely responsible for the climate change now under way, not nature or fortune. People and nations who willfully evade taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions may one day be called to account.

NOTES

1. In discussions of climate change “mitigation” refers to policies or actions directed toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions; “adaptation” refers to how plants, animals, and humans respond to climate change (excluding, of course, their mitigation responses). The meaning of these terms is further elaborated later.

2. For an account of the formation of the IPCC, see Agrawala (1998).

3. Emissions trading is a scheme in which an entity (such as a nation) whose emissions of some substance are limited by a binding agreement can purchase the right to emit more of the substance in question from an entity that will limit its emissions by the same amount in exchange for the payment (emissions trading is discussed in detail below). Carbon sinks are biological or geological reservoirs (such as forests) in which carbon is sequestered; the idea being that nations can “offset” their emissions by sequestering carbon that would otherwise be in the atmosphere.

4. Annex 1 countries are the industrialized countries of North America and Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand (a full list can be found on the web at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>); together they were responsible for more than two-thirds of global GHG emissions in 1990.

5. Babiker, Jacoby, Reilly, and Reiner (2002).

6. For a list of OPEC member states see www.opec.org.

7. Smit, Burton, Klein, and Wandel (2000, p. 225). It should be noted that the term “adaptation” is typically used positively in opposition to the negative term, “maladaptation.”

8. See, for example, Abramovitz et al. (2002), Smithers and Smit (1997), Kates (2001), Kelly and Adger (2000), Reilly and Schimmelpfennig (2000), and Smit, Burton, Klein, and Wandel (2000).

9. Still, it is worth observing that adaptations can stand in feedback relations to the climate change to which they are a response. For example, one possible adaptation to a warmer world is more extensive use of air conditioning, which itself contributes to greater warming. Thus, we must be careful that in trying to live with climate change, we do not make it worse. I owe this point to Steve Gardiner.

10. For example, see Jamieson (1990, 1991).

11. For example, Rayner and Malone (1997), Pielke, Jr. (1998), Parry, Arnell, Hulme, Nicholls, and Livermore (1998), and Pielke, Jr. and Sarewitz (2000).

12. Because he has a definition of the term different from the one employed in the FCCC, Pielke, Jr. (2005) claims that adaptation is a neglected option, despite the occurrence of the word in the treaty and in many subsequent official documents. This way of putting the point seems to transform an important substantive critique into

what appears to be a linguistic dispute. The core of Pielke's, Jr. challenge is that focusing on adaptation to climate variability and extreme events, whatever their causes, would be much more effective than focusing on climate change, with the emphasis on scientific knowledge and mitigation strategies that this approach brings along, and the attendant policy gridlock that follows. While I am sympathetic to this view, it raises important questions about how to determine relevant alternatives when faced with policy questions. Why not, for example, abandon questions of weather and climate altogether and focus instead on global poverty? I have more to say about this in my response to Schelling below.

13. <http://www.climate-science.gov/Library/stratplan2003/vision/default.htm> (accessed August 8th, 2003).

14. <http://www.epa.gov/oppeoee1/globalwarming/publications/car/ch6.pdf> (accessed June 22nd, 2002).

15. The idea that climate change poses a dichotomous choice between adaptation and mitigation may stem from Matthews (1987), who drew a sharp distinction between those she called "adaptationists" and "preventionists;" but already by 1991 Crosson and Rosenberg (1991) were treating this as a mistaken dichotomy that had been bypassed by the policy discussion.

16. National Academy of Sciences (2002, p. 27).

17. Häkkinen and Rhines (2004).

18. Thompson and Wallace (2001).

19. Available at <http://amap.no/workdocs/index.cfm?dirsub=%2FACIA%2Foverview> (accessed December 17, 2004).

20. The following discussion is based on Glantz and Jamieson (2000).

21. Summary report of proceedings: Inter-American Development Bank Consultative Group meeting for the reconstruction and transformation of Central America (May 1999), Stockholm, Sweden (http://www.iadb.org/regions/re2/consultative_group/summary.htm, accessed November 7, 2000).

22. *Honduras This Week* (May 29, 2000) (<http://www.marrder.com/htw/special/environment/70.htm>, accessed April 23, 2003).

23. Summary report of proceedings: Inter-American Development Bank Consultative Group meeting for the reconstruction and transformation of Central America (May 1999), Stockholm, Sweden (http://www.iadb.org/regions/re2/consultative_group/summary.htm, accessed November 7, 2000).

24. *Honduras This Week* (May 29, 2000) (<http://www.marrder.com/htw/special/environment/70.htm>, accessed April 23, 2003).

25. Davis (2001).

26. Iliffe (1987, p. 3).

27. See African Development Bank et al. (2003) and the sources cited therein for documentation of the claims made in this paragraph.

28. IPCC (2001).

29. Available on the web at http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/1009wssd_pol_declaration.doc (accessed August 12, 2003).

30. One problem is that these funds are intended to finance adaptation to climate change, not adaptation to natural climate variability. This requires a successful applicant to identify the incremental risk posed by climate change and show that the benefit that the proposed project would provide would address only this increment.

This burden is not only almost impossible to discharge in many cases, but it is an absurd requirement for reasons explained below.

31. IPCC (2001).
32. Ayres and Walters (1991), as cited in Spash (2002, p. 164).
33. Fagan (2001).
34. African Development Bank et al. (2003, p. 1).
35. <http://www.id21.org/society/S10aisdr1gl.html> (accessed August 12, 2003).
36. See also Jamieson (2005a).
37. For reasons discussed in the next section and suggested in note 30, it is also easier to specify and quantify duties related to mitigation than those related to adaptation. Carbon dioxide emissions are directly measurable; success in adapting to climate change is not.
38. However, we should bear in mind that, though they are importantly related, reducing emissions is not exactly the same as slowing down the rate of climate change (Pielke, Jr., Klein, & Sarewitz, 2000).
39. For more on justice in adaptation see Adger, Huq, Mace, and Paavola (2005).
40. Jamieson (2001).
41. For example, Athanasiou and Baer (2002), Brown (2002), Cazorla and Toman (2001), Clausen and McNeilly (1998), Grubb (1995), Meyer (2000), Sachs et al. (2002), Shue (1995), Singer (2002), and the papers collected in Toth (1999). Of course, these ideas also have their detractors. For a critique of emissions trading see various papers by Larry Lohmann at www.thecornerhouse.org.uk. For an excellent survey of the issues see Gardiner (2004).
42. For a thorough defense of emissions trading in a GHG control regime see Stewart and Wiener (2003); for a contrary view, see Schelling (2002).
43. For a defense of this view see Agarwal and Narain (1991).
44. The following nine paragraphs are revised from Jamieson (2001).
45. Principle 4 is a principle of last resort because my list includes all the principles that I can think of that are attractive, and Principle 5 because it does not have the theoretical economy of the other principles on the list.
46. While this principle is one that is often associated with the American position and there are different ways of understanding the data, it is clear that the United States is an inefficient producer of GDP relative to most European countries and Japan. Thus, this principle might imply that some American emission permissions should be transferred to France (for example).
47. For a defense of 2050 as the index year, see Singer (2002); generally, for a discussion, see Gardiner (2004).
48. For example, Gardiner (2004) and Shue (1992).
49. See Stewart and Wiener (2003) for further discussion of these issues.
50. Cf. Held (2002).
51. For an argument that some transnational corporations are more powerful than many states, and hence *de facto* more sovereign, see Korten (1995) and Hutton (2002).
52. For the first view see Singer (2002); for the second see Boot (2002).
53. Rawls (1999, p. 69).
54. For more on these points see O'Neill (1994).
55. Pogge (1994) vigorously argues this point; I have learned much from his critical discussion of Rawls.

56. For further objections along these lines see Beitz (2000), Buchanan (2000), and Kuper (2000).

57. There are more expansive ways of characterizing cosmopolitanism (e.g., Jones, 1999, p. 15), and less expansive ways (e.g., dropping the requirement that individual people are the primary agents); this will do for the present purposes.

58. Here I have benefited from discussions with Leif Wenar, and from reading Wenar (2002).

59. For further discussion, see Crisp and Jamieson (2000).

60. Related views have been put forward by Kuper (2000) and Sen (2002). In Jamieson (2005b) I have discussed this view in some detail from a utilitarian perspective.

61. Dobson (1998) chides me for largely ignoring this view in Jamieson (1994). I have been helped by his discussion.

62. Cf. Anatole France who derided the claim that laws against sleeping under bridges apply equally to the rich and poor.

63. I have selected Sierra Leone for my example since it ranks dead last in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (UNDP, 2000).

64. While philosophers often draw technical distinctions between duties and obligations, for the present purposes I use these terms interchangeably.

65. Of course a Hobbesian or Communitarian could consistently hold that there are extensive and rigorous transnational duties but that they are not duties of justice. This sort of Hobbesian or Communitarian could agree with much that I say.

66. See Sachs (1993, p. 5) on the idea of the global middle class.

67. A clarification (at the behest of Walter Sinnott-Armstrong): my claim is that (everything else being equal) X's contributing significantly to causing a problem that harms a generally identifiable moral patient is a sufficient (not a necessary) condition for supposing that X has a duty with respect to the contribution.

68. Schelling (1992, p. 7).

69. Indeed, it may be obligatory to carry some of them out. There are a number of ways of defending such a claim in detail; one such way is by recourse to a moral theory that I call "progressive consequentialism" in unpublished work.

70. Because climate change involves actions in which some identifiable people and corporations are involved in inflicting harms on other people, there is beginning to be interest in viewing these actions as candidates for legal remedies. There has been discussion of such litigation in the pages of *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, and the *Financial Times*, as well as in the offices of various reinsurance companies and multinational corporations (or so it is said). However, the most severe consequences of climate change will be suffered by those in the further future, and there are serious philosophical problems about how duties to such beneficiaries should be understood. See Parfit (1984) and Howarth's essay in this volume.

71. Indeed, I believe that there is generally a movement toward environmental justice becoming the key organizing concept of environmentalism (see Jamieson, 2005c).

72. See Jamieson (2005b) and Gardiner (2003).

73. Cf. the following remark from Melissa Carey of Environmental Defense: "The Earth is round, Elvis is dead, and yes, climate change is happening."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have lectured on this material at many universities and conferences around the world and I regret that I cannot acknowledge all those from whom I have learned. However, I would like to thank the participants in the workshop at Dartmouth College for which this chapter was originally prepared, and the following for their written comments on earlier versions of the manuscript: Kier Olsen DeVries, Steve Gardiner, Roger Pielke Jr., Dan Sarewitz, Peter Singer, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Christine Thomas, and Leif Wenar.

REFERENCES

- Abramovitz, J., Banuri, T., Girot, P., Orlando, B., Schneider, N., Spanger-Siegfried, E., Switzer, J., & Hammill, A. (2002). *Adapting to climate change: Natural resource management and vulnerability reduction*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN – The World Conservation Union.
- Adger, N., Huq, S., Mace, M., & Paavola, J. (Eds) (2005). *Fairness in adapting to climate change*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Department for International Development, United Kingdom, Directorate-General for International Cooperation, The Netherlands, Directorate General for Development, European Commission, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany, Organisations for Economic Development, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, & the World Bank. (2003). *Poverty and climate change: Reducing the vulnerability of the poor through adaptation*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Agarwal, A., & Narain, S. (1991). *Global warming in an unequal world*. New Delhi, India: Centre for Science and Development.
- Agrawala, S. (1998). Context and early origins of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Climatic Change*, 39, 605–620.
- Athanasiou, T., & Baer, P. (2002). *Dead heat: Global justice and global warming*. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Ayres, R. U., & Walters, J. (1991). The greenhouse effect: Damages, costs and abatement. *Environmental and Resource Economics*, 1(3), 237–270.
- Babiker, M. H., Jacoby, H. D., Reilly, J. M., & Reiner, D. M. (2002). The evolution of a climate regime: Kyoto to Marrakech. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 2/3, 195–206.
- Beitz, C. (2000). Rawls's law of peoples. *Ethics*, 110(4), 669–696.
- Boot, M. (2002). *The savage wars of peace: Small wars and the rise of American power*. New York: Basic Books.
- Brown, D. (2002). *American heat: Ethical problems with the United States' response to global warming*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Buchanan, A. (2000). Rawls's law of peoples: Rules for a vanished Westphalian world. *Ethics*, 110(4), 697–721.

- Cazorla, M., & Toman, M. (2001). International equity and climate change policy. In: M. Toman (Ed.), *Climate change economics and policy* (pp. 235–247). Washington, DC: Resources for the Future.
- Clausen, E., & McNeilly, L. (1998). *Equity and global climate change*. Washington, DC: Pew Center on Global Climate Change.
- Crisp, R., & Jamieson, D. (2000). A global resources tax: On Pogge on Rawls. In: V. Davion & C. Wolf (Eds), *The idea of political liberalism: Essays on Rawls* (pp. 90–101). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Crosson, P., & Rosenberg, N. (1991). Adapting to climate change. *Resources*, 103, 17–21.
- Davis, M. (2001). *Late Victorian holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the Third World*. London: Verso.
- Dobson, A. (1998). *Justice and the environment*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fagan, B. (2001). *The little ice age: How climate made history, 1300–1850*. New York: Basic Books.
- Freeman, P., Martin, L., Mechler, R., Warner, K., & Hausmann, P. (2002). *Catastrophes and development: Integrating natural catastrophes into development planning*. Disaster Management Facility, World Bank, Working Paper Series no. 4. The World Bank, Washington, DC.
- Gallup, J. L., & Sachs, J. D. (2000). *The economic burden of malaria*. CID Working Paper 52, Center for International Development, Harvard University. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- Gardiner, S. (2003). The pure intergenerational problem. *The Monist: Special Issue on Moral Distance*, 86(3), 481–500.
- Gardiner, S. (2004). Ethics and global climate change. *Ethics*, 114, 555–600.
- Glantz, M., & Jamieson, D. (2000). Societal response to hurricane Mitch and intra versus intergenerational equity issues: Whose norms should apply? *Risk Analysis*, 20(6), 869–882.
- Gore, A. (1992). *Earth in the balance*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Grubb, M. (1995). Seeking fair weather. *International Affairs*, 71(3), 463–496.
- Häkkinen, S., & Rhines, P. (2004). Decline of subpolar north Atlantic circulation during the 1990s. *Science*, 304, 555–559.
- Held, D. (2002). Law of states, law of peoples: Three models of sovereignty. *Legal Theory*, 8, 1–44.
- Hutton, W. (2002). *The world we're in*. London: Little, Brown and Company.
- Ilfie, J. (1987). *The African poor: A history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2001). *Climate change 2001: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability: A contribution of working group II to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jamieson, D. (1990). Managing the future: Public policy, scientific uncertainty, and global Warming. In: D. Scherer (Ed.), *Upstream/downstream: Essays in environmental ethics* (pp. 67–89). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Jamieson, D. (1991). The epistemology of climate change: Some morals for managers. *Society and Natural Resources*, 4, 319–329.
- Jamieson, D. (1994). Global environmental justice. In: R. Attfield & A. Belsey (Eds), *Philosophy and the natural environment* (pp. 199–210). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Reprinted in Jamieson (2002).

Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice

247

- Jamieson, D. (2001). Climate change and global environmental justice. In: C. Miller & P. Edwards (Eds), *Changing the atmosphere: Expert knowledge and environmental governance* (pp. 287–307). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Jamieson, D. (2005a). Duties to the distant: Aid, assistance, and intervention in the developing world. *The Journal of Ethics*, 9, 151–170.
- Jamieson, D. (2005b). When utilitarians should be virtue theorists. *Utilitas*. In press.
- Jamieson, D. (2005c). The heart of environmentalism. In: P. Pezzullo & R. Sandler (Eds), *Environmental justice and environmentalism: Contrary or complementary?* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. In press.
- Jones, C. (1999). *Global justice: Defending cosmopolitanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kates, R. (2001). Cautionary tales: Adaptation and the global poor. *Climatic Change*, 45, 5–17.
- Kelley, P. M., & Adger, W. N. (2000). Theory and practice in assessing vulnerability to climate change and facilitating adaptation. *Climatic Change*, 47, 325–352.
- Klineberg, E. (2002). *Heat wave: A social autopsy of disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Korten, D. C. (1995). *When corporations rule the world*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Kuper, A. (2000). Rawlsian global justice: Beyond *The Law of Peoples* to a cosmopolitan law of persons. *Political Theory*, 28(5), 640–674.
- Matthews, J. (1987). Global climate change: Toward a greenhouse policy. *Issues in Science and Technology*, 3, 57.
- Meyer, A. (2000). *Contraction and convergence*. Dartington, UK: Green Books.
- National Academy of Sciences. (2002). *Abrupt climate change: Inevitable surprises*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- O'Neill, O. (1994). Justice and boundaries. In: C. Brown (Ed.), *Political restructuring in Europe: Ethical perspectives* (pp. 69–88). London: Routledge.
- Parfit, D. (1984). *Reasons and persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parry, M., Arnell, N., Hulme, M., Nicholls, R., & Livermore, M. (1998). Adapting to the inevitable. *Nature*, 395(6704), 741.
- Parry, M., Arnell, N., McMichael, T., Nicholls, R., Martens, P., Kovats, S., Livermore, M., Rosenzweig, C., Iglesias, A., & Fischer, G. (2001). Millions at risk: Defining critical climate change threats and targets. *Global Environmental Change*, 11(3), 181–183.
- Pielke, R., Jr. (1998). Rethinking the role of adaptation in climate change policy. *Global Environmental Change*, 8(2), 159–170.
- Pielke, R., Jr. (2005). Misdefining climate change: Consequences for science and action. *Environmental Science and Policy*. In press.
- Pielke, R., Jr., & Sarewitz, D. (2000). Breaking the global-warming gridlock. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 286(1), 55–64.
- Pielke, R., Jr., Klein, R., & Sarewitz, D. (2000). Turning the big knob: An evaluation of the use of energy policy to modulate future climate impacts. *Energy and Environment*, 11, 255–276.
- Pogge, T. (1994). An egalitarian law of peoples. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 23(3), 195–224.
- Rawls, J. (1999). *The law of peoples*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rayner, S., & Malone, E. (1997). Zen and the art of climate maintenance. *Nature*, 332–334.
- Reilly, J., & Schimmelpfennig, D. (2000). Irreversibility, uncertainty, and learning: Portraits of adaptation to long-term climate change. *Climatic Change*, 45, 253–278.
- Sachs, W. (1993). Global ecology and the shadow of 'development'. In: W. Sachs (Ed.), *Global ecology: A new arena of political conflict* (pp. 3–21). London: Zed Books.

- Sachs, W., Acselrad, H., Akhter, F., Amon, A., Egziabher, T. B. G., French, H., Haavisto, P., Hawken, P., Henderson, H., Khosla, A., Larrain, S., Loske, R., Roddick, A., Taylor, V., Von Weizsäcker, C., & Zabelin, S. (2002). *The Jo'burg memo: Fairness in a fragile world, memorandum for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*. Berlin, Germany: Heinrich Boll Foundation.
- Schelling, T. (1992). Some economics of global warming. *The American Economic Review*, 82(1), 1–14.
- Schelling, T. (1997). The cost of combating global warming: Facing the tradeoffs. *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6), 8–14.
- Schelling, T. (2002). What makes greenhouse sense? *Foreign Affairs*, 81(3), 2–9.
- Schneider, S. H. (1989). *Global warming: Are we entering the greenhouse century?* San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Sen, A. (2002). Justice across borders. In: P. de Greiff & C. Cronin (Eds), *Global politics and transnational justice*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Shue, H. (1992). The unavoidability of justice. In: A. Hurrell & B. Kingsbury (Eds), *The international politics of the environment* (pp. 373–397). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shue, H. (1995). Avoidable necessity: Global warming, international fairness and alternative energy. In: I. Shapiro & J. W. Decew (Eds), *Theory and practice: NOMOS XXXVII* (pp. 239–264). New York: NYU Press.
- Singer, P. (2002). *One world: The ethics of globalization*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Smit, B., Burton, I., Klein, R., & Wandel, J. (2000). An anatomy of adaptation to climate change and variability. *Climatic Change*, 45, 223–251.
- Smithers, J., & Smit, B. (1997). Human adaptation to climatic variability and change. *Global Environmental Change*, 7, 251–264.
- Spash, C. (2002). *Greenhouse economics: Value and ethics*. New York: Routledge.
- Stewart, R. B., & Wiener, J. B. (2003). *Reconstructing climate policy*. Washington, DC: AEI Press.
- Thompson, D. W. J., & Wallace, J. M. (2001). Regional climate impacts of the northern hemisphere annular mode. *Science*, 293(5527), 85–89.
- Toth, F. (1999). *Fair weather? Equity concerns in climate change*. London: Earthscan.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2000). *Human development report 2000*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wenar, L. (2002). The legitimacy of peoples. In: P. de Greiff & C. Cronin (Eds), *Global politics and transnational justice* (pp. 53–76). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

GIVING A VOICE TO POSTERITY – DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND REPRESENTATION OF FUTURE PEOPLE

KRISTIAN SKAGEN EKELI

(Accepted in revised form March 20, 2005)

ABSTRACT. The aim of this paper is to consider whether some seats in a democratically elected legislative assembly ought to be reserved for representatives of future generations. In order to examine this question, I will propose a new democratic model for representing posterity. It is argued that this model has several advantages compared with a model for the democratic representation of future people previously suggested by Andrew Dobson. Nevertheless, the democratic model that I propose confronts at least two difficult problems. First, it faces insoluble problems of representative legitimacy. Second, one might question whether this model provides a reasonably effective way to represent future interests compared with existing representative democratic institutions. Despite such problems, it is argued that political representation of posterity can be defended on the basis of fundamental ideas and ideals in recent theory of deliberative democracy. The first reason for this is that in a number of cases democratic decisions cannot be regarded as normatively legitimate from the point of view of deliberative democracy, unless posterity is given a voice. The second reason is that representation of posterity can contribute to more rational and impartial deliberations and decisions in legislative assemblies.

KEY WORDS: Andrew Dobson, deliberative democracy, future generations, political representation

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Although present decisions and policies can cause serious future environmental harms, future people do not have the opportunity to protest or promote their interests by political and legal means. In contrast to existing persons and interest groups, future generations cannot affect or influence political decisions through participation in public debates and elections. Against this background, I believe it is important to consider whether future

¹ I would especially like to thank Cornelius Cappelen, Robert Goodin, Bjørn Myskja, John O'Neill, Thomas Pogge, and Jon Wetlesen for valuable comments and discussions. I am also grateful to Jakob Elster, Øyvind Giæver, Johnny Søraker, and Torbjørn Tännsjö for useful comments.

interests ought to be protected by means of new forms of political representation.

In this paper, I will discuss whether some seats in a democratically elected legislative assembly ought to be reserved for representatives of posterity. This question has not received much attention in the literature on political philosophy and political theory. The most important exception is Andrew Dobson's presentation and defense of a democratic model for representation of future generations.² The aim of this paper is to discuss a new and alternative model for representing posterity. In what follows, I will term my proposal "the extended franchise model," while Dobson's will be called "the restricted franchise model."³

Drawing on central ideas and ideals in recent theory of deliberative democracy, two reasons for defending my extended franchise model will be identified. The first is that in a number of cases democratic decisions cannot be regarded as normatively legitimate from the point of view of deliberative democracy, unless posterity is given a voice. This view on the legitimacy of democratic decisions is based on the fundamental moral intuition that collectively binding decisions can only be regarded as ethically justifiable if they result from a process of deliberation where all affected parties have had the opportunity to participate. The second reason is that representation of future generations can contribute to more rational and impartial deliberations and decisions in legislative assemblies. In this connection, I also argue that the proposed extended franchise model provides an institutional framework that can induce the process of deliberation that Robert E. Goodin's model of "incorporated interests" presupposes. Goodin's model does not imply that some seats in legislative assemblies should be reserved for representatives of posterity, but that all citizens should internalize (or incorporate) the interests of future generations through the process of deliberation.⁴ I believe that such internalization of future interests among citizens and legislators can be promoted in a useful way by an institutional framework that includes formal representation of posterity in

² See Dobson, 1996. To my knowledge, Dobson's paper represents the most extensive and thorough discussion of the problem whether some seats in a legislative assembly ought to be reserved for representatives of future generations.

³ I am grateful to Robert Goodin for suggesting these terms for describing the two models.

⁴ See Goodin, 1996 and 2000. Goodin describes the internalization of the interests of others as a process in which we make their interests, needs, and perspectives "imaginatively present" in our minds when we weigh reasons for and against a given policy or course of action. Thus, it is an "internal-reflective" process where we imagine ourselves in the place of others. Goodin claims that since it is impossible to enfranchise future generations, the best we can hope for is that the interests of posterity will come to be internalized by a sufficient number of people who are empowered to vote and participate in the political decision-making process (Goodin, 1996, p. 844).

legislative assemblies. This is the proposal that I wish to elaborate in the present paper.

My discussion will proceed through the following steps. The aim of part 2 is to present some arguments in support of the assumption that there is a need for new forms of political representation in order to protect future interests. In part 3, I will first give an account of some central ideas and ideals in recent theory of deliberative democracy. Then I will present my extended franchise model, and argue that this model has several advantages compared with Dobson's restricted franchise model in view of ideals in deliberative democracy. Finally, some problems facing the proposed model will be discussed. The aim of part 4 is to argue that formal representation of future generations in legislative assemblies can be defended on the basis of fundamental ideas in recent theory of deliberative democracy. Here I will also address the problem of how many representatives posterity should have in the legislative assembly.

2. THE NEED FOR NEW FORMS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

It is reasonable to assume that the environmental problems we face today can only be solved through collective action and new forms of international co-operation and co-ordination. Adequate national and international environmental policies depend to a large extent on voters and their representatives. Today, it is difficult to achieve the necessary popular and political support for effective environmental reforms. The first reason for this is that in many cases the adverse environmental effects of present decisions and policies will fall upon future generations, while present generations must pay the costs and renounce short-term benefits in order to avoid future environmental harms. One can also question the extent to which both voters and politicians are prepared or willing to make short-term sacrifices for the sake of the long-term interests of succeeding generations – especially in cases where the long-term gains of environmental reforms are uncertain. The absence of effective action with regard to the problem of global climate change seems to illustrate the last point.

Second, contemporary legislative assemblies consist only of representatives of present generations. Since legislators are merely accountable to present citizens, politicians and political parties will in many cases have strong incentives not to take a position that deviates too much from the preferences of their voters, in order to avoid being punished during elections. As pointed out by Kavka and Warren, "politicians in democratic states, who are elected for relatively short periods and who are judged by

voters largely in terms of the immediate results of their actions, also have strong incentives to overdiscount the future in the policy-making process” (Kavka and Warren, 1983, p. 28).

Third, democratic decisions often reflect the outcomes of political bargaining processes where powerful organized interest groups (such as labor unions and employers’ federations) play an important role. According to Robert Paehlke, “policies favor the most organized interest groups, whose members tend to be wealthy and tend to seek concrete, economically self-interested, and immediate gains” (Paehlke, 1989, p. 200). In existing political systems, coalitions of powerful interests may be able to delay change, and solutions to policy problems are often reached on the basis of compromises between competing interest groups. Tine Stein has argued that the bargaining power of interest groups dealing with material or economic interests can help explain their ability to influence policy-making in democratic states: “The trade unions are able to threaten with strike and the employers’ federations are able to threaten with the refusal to invest. When the refusal of those contributions leads to an economic crisis, it affects the welfare of many people.... In contrast, interest groups that stand outside of the economic sphere (such as environmental groups) do not have the same kind of potentially useful power of conflict at their disposal” (Stein, 1998, p. 429).

Fourth, in a world of sovereign states, citizens’ collective right to democratic self-determination can be regarded as an obstacle to achieve the necessary international co-operation and co-ordination that seems to be required in order to solve regional and global environmental problems. Voters and their representatives (i.e., politicians and governments) are often reluctant to adopt international environmental agreements that would transfer authority to an international institution on issues such as standard setting, monitoring, and enforcement. Thus, international environmental agreements rarely incorporate sanctions, compliance systems, or dispute settlement mechanisms.

The preceding reflections are not meant to imply that citizens and politicians in contemporary democracies do not take into account the interests of posterity. They do so in various ways. Both voters and politicians are often seriously concerned about how policy choices will affect the near future – our children and grandchildren. However, in many states (both democratic and undemocratic), the situation seems to be different when it comes to more remote future generations. In general, it seems to be much more difficult to achieve popular and political support for tough policies that will benefit the more distant future. As former US Vice President Al Gore has pointed out, a problem facing democratic systems is that “the future whispers while the present shouts” (Gore, 1992, p. 170). In light of

the foregoing considerations, I believe it is important to consider reforms of existing political institutions that can make them more future-oriented and contribute to a better protection of future needs. The extended franchise model can be viewed as one possible strategy in this connection.

3. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND MODELS FOR REPRESENTATION OF POSTERITY

In what follows, I will first give an account of some central ideas and ideals in recent theory of deliberative democracy. Then I will present the extended franchise model for representation of future generations, and argue that this model has several advantages compared with Dobson's restricted franchise model in view of ideals in deliberative democracy. Finally, some problems facing the proposed model will be discussed.

3.1. *Deliberative Democracy – Central Ideas and Ideals*

Advocates of the deliberative model of democracy emphasize that collectively binding decisions should, ideally, be made on the basis of a rational and impartial discourse (that is, a process of discussion and argumentation) where all the affected parties (or their representatives) have the opportunity to participate and present critical arguments for and against the proposals that have been put forward. The primary aim is to establish a democratic decision making procedure that provides an open and free forum for a reasoned dialogue and argumentation that can lead to more rational and impartial decision outcomes. Important contributions to the recent revival of the theory of deliberative democracy are presented by Jon Elster (1986), Bernard Manin (1987), Joshua Cohen (1989), John Dryzek (1990), John Rawls (1993), Jürgen Habermas (1996), and Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (1996).

In the theory of deliberative democracy, importance is attached to the process of public deliberation that takes place among the decision-makers before the issue in question is decided through voting. In this context, the following question emerges: what is the point and value of such deliberation or discourse before making a decision through voting? The answer is that decisions should be made as a result of a thorough and reasoned discussion in order to improve the basis of information and enhance the level of reflection among the participants. Such a discourse is assumed to have a transformative effect in the sense that the initial or pre-deliberative preferences of the participants will undergo a change that can lead to more rational and impartial decisions. Thus, deliberation can be regarded as a form of discussion intended to change the preferences on the basis of which

people decide how to act.⁵ On this view, democratic decision making is not primarily about aggregating given preferences through voting, but about the transformation of preferences and judgments through open and free public deliberation among citizens and their representatives. If one accepts that there are convincing arguments in support of a deliberative model of democracy, the challenge is to find institutional mechanisms that can promote rational and impartial deliberations and decisions.

3.2. *The Extended Franchise Model vs. the Restricted Franchise Model*

According to the extended franchise model that I will propose, some seats in the legislative assembly (for instance 5%) should be reserved for future generation representatives (hereafter F-representatives). The F-representatives should be assigned law-making competence, and they should be democratically elected in much the same way as present generation representatives (hereafter P-representatives). This means that all citizens who have the right to vote would have two votes each. In this way, the electorate would have the opportunity to vote on two sets of representatives. During election campaigns, the future generations candidates could present the ends and means they will advocate in the legislative assembly so that the electorate would have the opportunity to consider their political programs.

In order to give the F-representatives an effective political tool, I suggest that a qualified majority of the F-representatives (for instance 2/3 or 3/4) should be assigned the right to demand that the final decision about a law proposal should be delayed – either for 2 years or until a new election has been held.⁶ This does not give a qualified majority of the F-representatives a means to block the decisions of a simple majority, but to slow down the process of deliberation and decision-making. In this way, the F-representatives have the opportunity to lengthen the time interval between two decisions in order to prevent excessive focus on short-term interests. This device can also serve as a means to avoid hasty decisions that may inflict serious harms upon future generations. I believe that this right to demand delays can be defended on the basis of central ideas and ideals in deliberative democracy because it is a mechanism that may promote a more thorough discussion about the issue in question before a final decision is made.

In “Representative Democracy and the Environment” (1996), Dobson has presented an alternative democratic model that I will term the restricted franchise model. Like the extended franchise model, Dobson’s model also implies that some seats in legislative assemblies should be reserved for

⁵ See Przeworski, 1998, p. 140.

⁶ I will leave open the question whether this right to demand delays should apply to all issue-areas or a restricted range of issues.

representatives of posterity who are ascribed law-making competence, but who have no right to require delays. One important difference between the model that I propose and Dobson's model is that he does not assume that all voters ought to have the right to elect F-representatives. Instead, he suggests that this right should be reserved to proxy (or substitute) future generations that are drawn from the present one. According to Dobson, the proxy would function in exactly the same way as any democratic electorate, and it should consist of what he terms "the environmental sustainability lobby" (i.e., environmental groups and organizations) (Dobson, 1996, pp. 132–133). Furthermore, Dobson claims that candidates (hereafter F-candidates) should be drawn from this proxy or lobby. Thus, the right to represent posterity during election campaigns is restricted to F-candidates from the sustainability lobby. This position seems to rest on the assumption that this lobby is better suited to represent and promote future interests than other persons and groups.

Dobson's restricted franchise model creates some problems that the proposed extended franchise model avoids. First, Dobson's model implies that members of the proxy have two votes each, while the rest of the electorate only has one. This is obviously problematic from a democratic point of view – especially with regard to the ideal of "one person, one vote" and the assumption that all voters ought to be treated equally.⁷ A second line of criticism is that Dobson's model appears to close off both debate and reasonable disagreement about what best serves the interests of posterity, in the sense that one group or movement (i.e., the sustainability lobby) with a restricted range of perspectives is given the status of representative for posterity in advance of public deliberation. These objections will be discussed more closely in the next section.

3.3. *The Problem of Representative Legitimacy: Who Should be Empowered to Represent Posterity?*

One important objection to the extended franchise model as it was presented above, can be put like this. If the electorate has the opportunity to vote on which F-candidates they like, and if the F-representatives are only accountable to present generations, then it is likely that many voters will use their vote to elect F-representatives who will promote their own short-term interests instead of the long-term interests of posterity.

Against this background, the following problem of representative legitimacy arises. Who should be empowered to speak in the interest of posterity

⁷ Dobson offers the following response to this objection: "One way of catering for this might be to deprive the proxy generation of its vote for the present generation and leave it with a vote for future generations." (Dobson, 1996, p. 134).

in legislative assemblies, and what is the source of legitimacy of such representatives? One possible, but non-ideal, solution to this problem is to establish a system where the electorate only has a right to vote on candidates that most likely will promote the interests and needs of future generations. However, the problem confronting this solution is how one can find adequate or suitable candidates that can fill the role as spokespersons and guardians of posterity in the legislative assembly. At first glance, one group seems to be well suited for the task under consideration. This is environmental organizations and their members. If one finds this solution acceptable, one could imagine an electoral system where different environmental organizations put forward lists of candidates like ordinary political parties. This view on the question of who should be empowered to represent posterity is similar to that of Dobson (See Section 3.2).

This position faces the problem that it seems to close off the debate about what best serves the interests of future generations. It gives one particular group (i.e., environmental organizations or the sustainability lobby) with a restricted range of perspectives the status of representative for posterity in advance of public deliberation.⁸ Environmental organizations not only make special claims to care about posterity, but also express particular views on what this involves – views that are open to debate. They normally assume that some form of environmental protection best realizes the interests of future generations, where their more technologically optimistic opponents might claim that this will not serve future interests at all. Much of the debate between environmentalists and their opponents is not about whether we should be concerned about future generations, but how we should meet their interests. Environmentalists represent just one strand in that debate.⁹ The discussion about genetically modified (GM) crops can serve as an illustration. On the one hand, most environmental organizations would be against the development of GM food. On the other hand, it is open for a defender of GM crops to claim that this would be deeply detrimental to the interests of posterity. Given foreseeable population levels in the future, they might argue that future people will be left unable to meet their nutritional needs without development of GM food.

This objection is serious because public debate and discussion ought to be open in deliberative democracies. From this point of view, one should not give one particular group or movement the privileged status of representative for future generations in advance of public deliberation. Moreover,

⁸ John O'Neill has made me aware of this objection to the position outlined above.

⁹ See, for example, Beckerman and Pasek (2001) and their critique of environmentalists' diagnosis of and solutions to current environmental problems. In many cases, such disputes reflect, I believe, reasonable disagreements about how we should meet future interests and needs. This is discussed more closely below.

disputes about what best serves the interests and needs of posterity often reflect reasonable disagreements and should not be closed off in deliberative democracies. As pointed out by John Rawls, there are several sources of reasonable disagreements. In this connection, the following are particularly important:

a. The evidence – empirical and scientific – bearing on the case is conflicting and complex, and thus hard to assess and evaluate. b. Even where we agree fully about the kinds of considerations that are relevant, we may disagree about their weight, and so arrive at different judgments. c. To some extent all our concepts, and not only moral and political concepts, are vague and subject to hard cases; and this indeterminacy means that we must rely on judgment and interpretation (and on judgments about interpretations) within some range (not sharply specifiable) where reasonable persons may differ. d. To some extent (how great we cannot tell) the way we assess evidence and weigh moral and political values is shaped by our total experience, our whole course of life up to now; and our total experiences must always differ... e. Often there are different kinds of normative considerations of different force on both sides of an issue and it is difficult to make an overall assessment.¹⁰

In view of the preceding considerations, I do not believe that the right to represent future generations should be restricted to environmental organizations (or, as Dobson contends, to the environmental sustainability lobby). Rather, it should be open to anyone who cares for the well-being of posterity to establish what can be called F-parties (“Future-parties”), that is, political parties founded with the purpose to protect the interests and needs of future generations. One could imagine an electoral system where such parties were assigned the right to put forward lists of F-candidates. If such a system is adopted, the voters can elect F-representatives from F-parties in addition to P-representatives from ordinary political parties.

Here it should be pointed out that I do not think that anyone should be allowed to form an F-party. If that were possible, some persons and interest groups would, as indicated above, probably found such parties for strategic and egoistic reasons. More precisely, they might establish an F-party to promote the short-term interests of present groups instead of the interests of near and remote future generations. In order to prevent the formation of F-parties by agents and groups who do not care for the well-being of future generations, there is a need for legal norms that restrict the establishment of such parties. These norms should be inclusive, in the sense that they should not place restrictions on the variety of viewpoints about what best serves

¹⁰ Rawls, 1993, pp. 56–57. On the other hand, Rawls mentions the following sources of unreasonable disagreements: logical errors, prejudice and bias, self- and group interest, blindness and willfulness (Rawls, 1993, pp. 55 and 58).

the interests and needs of posterity. Rather, the primary aim of such legal norms would be to prevent certain people, groups, and organizations from founding an F-party because they are not suited to function as spokespersons or guardians of posterity. In this connection the crucial question is whether the potential spokespersons in fact *care* for the welfare of future people.¹¹ For example, there might be good reasons for not allowing certain powerful organized interest groups, such as labor unions and employers' federations, to form F-parties because their members often have short-term interests that may come into conflict with the interests of future generations. The legal norms regulating the formation and activities of political parties should be enforced either by special constitutional courts or by ordinary courts. It is important to emphasize that courts already play a similar role when they consider who are suitable representatives or guardians of children or other incompetent persons.

At this point, some might object that it is questionable from a democratic point of view to give courts the competence to enforce the laws that restrict the establishment of F-parties. The reason for this is that this system gives unelected judges a high degree of discretionary and policy-making power – especially in cases where it is difficult to determine whether a given group or organization in fact cares for the welfare of posterity. I agree that this can be a problem, but it is important to remember that some degree of lawmaking and policy-making discretion is inherent in the institution of judicial review.¹² It is also worth noting that most democratic states already have laws that restrict the establishment and activities of political parties, and courts are usually empowered to enforce such laws. Moreover, if the elected legislators are not satisfied with the way courts enforce the laws they have made, the legislature should have the opportunity to change judicial decisions – for the future – by amending the laws in question.

Another objection to the proposed extended franchise model is that it is likely that the ordinary parties will run candidates in both lists, and that they will be pressured to sing from the same “hymn sheet.” If this happens, it will undermine the new system of representation. I also think that this

¹¹ It can be complicated to specify the content of such laws in an adequate way, and it is likely that controversies will arise. Therefore, I think that this is a matter that should be placed in the hands of democratically elected legislators.

¹² Shapiro has called this “the interpretation trap,” and it implies “that whoever is assigned to interpret text to some degree makes the text” (Shapiro, 2002, p. 178). This means that if the people and their elected representatives employ judges to enforce (i.e., interpret and apply) laws, some power to govern will be transferred to the judges. The reason for this is that judges will always have some degree of interpretative elbow-room, and this will give them some degree of law-making discretion. Against this background, one can say that the law-making discretion of judges is related to the indeterminacy of laws. If the laws that judges are empowered to interpret and apply are very vague and unclear, they will have a high degree of law-making discretion.

scenario is plausible. In order to avoid this, ordinary political parties should not be allowed to form F-parties. From the point of view of deliberative democracy, this restriction is not problematic because the ordinary parties already have the opportunity to run candidates during elections of P-representatives, and they are free to participate and express their opinions in public debates.

If an electoral system is established along these lines, it is likely that, over time, a number of F-parties will be founded. Eventually, this will create a plurality of F-parties that will represent different and often competing perspectives in the debate about what best serves the interests and needs of future generations. In order to make the objectives of these parties available to the general public, F-parties should be required to publish their political programs. Like a number of existing environmental organizations, some of these parties may also constitute important centers of knowledge about the future effects of present environmental and technological decision making, since it is likely that they will make use of scientific experts from various research fields.

Some might question whether such a system of political representation of posterity provides a reasonably effective way to represent the interests and needs of posterity. One can imagine at least two problems in this connection. The first is that this system cannot guarantee that the F-representatives will in fact promote the needs and interests of future generations.¹³ A device similar to that of bound mandates might provide a solution to this problem. One could imagine a system where the F-representatives were bounded by a set of instructions about how they should act in behalf of posterity, i.e., protect and promote future interests in the legislative assembly. However, such a device faces a number of problems. First of all, it is problematic to formulate such instructions in an adequate manner. In addition, it is difficult to defend this device from the point of view of deliberative democracy because this model of democracy requires that legislators are free to change and revise their views or opinions through public deliberation. Therefore, they should not be bound by authoritative instructions.

The second problem pertaining to the effectiveness of the proposed electoral system is that the F-representatives are too dependent on the electorate because they are only accountable to present voters. Like ordinary politicians, their incentive to be re-elected may lead them to take

¹³ This problem is not restricted to the political representation of future people. A similar problem will also arise with regard to the representation of present people. There is, however, an important difference between present and future generations in this context. In contrast to future people, citizens have the opportunity to hold their representatives accountable by means of periodical elections. This accountability mechanism gives representatives an incentive to respect the preferences of the electorate.

positions that do not deviate too much from the short-term interests of presently living voters in order to avoid being punished during elections. This might affect their role as guardians and spokespersons of posterity negatively. One possible solution to this problem is to make it impossible for such representatives to be re-elected either as F-representatives or P-representatives. This mechanism makes the F-representatives more independent of the electorate, and it will make it easier for the F-representatives to support unpopular views and policies in cases where they believe that this is in the interest of posterity. But the problem with this solution is that it places the F-representatives in a position where they are not accountable to anyone. For this reason I think this solution should be rejected.

An interesting question arises in relation to the second problem of effectiveness. This is whether, or to what extent, the double-vote might encourage present generations to think, when casting their "second" vote, about the interests of future generations. Although it is difficult to answer this question, it is likely that periodical elections of F-representatives will promote more regular public debate about environmental problems in general and issues affecting the near and distant posterity in particular. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that people's preferences and perspectives change in response to inputs of additional information – particularly during political campaigns.¹⁴ If these assumptions are correct, the double-vote can make the interests and needs of future generations more "imaginatively present" in the minds of the voters. This might in turn encourage voters to behave in a more principled and impartial fashion, that is, act on the basis of an altruistic rather than self-interested stance. Of course, regular public debate and more inputs of information about issues affecting posterity cannot guarantee that the electorate will, in fact, take the needs of succeeding generations into account when they cast their votes. But it is an important precondition for achieving this end.

The proposed extended franchise model is not ideal with regard to *normative criteria of representative legitimacy*.¹⁵ This is primarily because future people cannot authorize their representatives to act on their behalf nor can they hold them democratically accountable by punishing them during elections.¹⁶ Since future generations cannot be directly represented like the electorate, authorization and accountability are absent as sources of representative legitimacy. Nevertheless, I believe that this model provides a

¹⁴ See, for example, Markus and Converse (1979) and Gerber and Jackson (1993).

¹⁵ In the literature on political philosophy and theory, there are a number of interesting discussions of normative criteria of representative legitimacy. See, for example, Pitkin (1967), Phillips (1995), and O'Neill (2001).

¹⁶ The problem of representative legitimacy with regard to representation of nature and future generations is discussed more closely in Eckersley (1999) and O'Neill (2001).

fairly adequate way of representing posterity. There are at least three reasons for this. The first is that F-parties and their members have *knowledge* and information about environmental problems and their potential future effects that might improve the quality of public debate about such issues and be useful for the task of representing posterity in legislative forums. The second is that the members of F-parties are presumed to *care* for the well-being of future people, in the sense that they will look after the interests and needs of posterity in present political decision-making processes. This implies that knowledge and care are the sources of their representative legitimacy.

The third reason is, I believe, that the proposed model constitutes an institutional framework that will improve the future orientation of political institutions. Obviously, it cannot ensure or guarantee that future needs will be protected. The extended franchise model is not proposed as a panacea. My claim is only that this model seems to be a reasonably effective means to make representative democratic institutions more future-oriented than in existing democratic states. This claim is primarily based on the assumption that it is likely that the extended franchise model will increase the debate, awareness, and knowledge among both citizens and legislators about issues affecting future generations. In this connection, it is worth mentioning the following point made by Nadia Urbinati: "A representative can be an advocate who turns the whole nation, not merely the assembly, into a public forum. The representative is an intermediary who can expand the space for political discussion beyond governmental institutions and at the same time bring political decisions to the people's attention for scrutiny" (Urbinati, 2000, pp. 766-767). To the extent that this is the case, representation of posterity can initiate an educative process that may induce citizens and legislators to internalize the interests of future generations, in the sense that the interests and needs of posterity is taken into account in the process of weighing reasons for and against alternative policies.¹⁷ This process can, in turn, produce more enlightened decisions. In this way, the proposed model of representation provides an institutional framework that can induce the process of deliberation that Goodin's model of incorporated interests presupposes (see Goodin, 1996). This argument will be developed in more detail in Section 4.2, where it will be argued that a formal representation of posterity can contribute to more rational and impartial deliberations and decisions in legislative forums.

¹⁷ Like Saward (2001) and Smith (2001), I believe that direct democratic devices such as citizens' initiatives and referendums may provide useful institutional mechanisms in order to engage citizens more directly in public deliberations about important environmental issues in general and issues affecting future generations in particular. But I will not discuss such devices here.

4. FUTURE GENERATIONS AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Another important problem facing the extended franchise model concerns how many representatives posterity should have in the legislative assembly. Some would probably claim that it is impossible to implement this model precisely because it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a reasonable and practically acceptable solution to this problem. Furthermore, one can argue that such a model can only serve as an effective institutional mechanism in order to protect future needs if the number of F-representatives is so high that they alone or in coalition with P-representatives have the opportunity to block decisions that may harm posterity. Since it is not very likely to reach sufficient popular agreement on reforms that give the F-representatives such voting power, the proposed model should be rejected.

I do not believe that these objections and practical problems pertaining to the number of F-representatives should be allowed to overshadow the normative question about the desirability of the extended franchise model. The main reason for this is that a formal representation of future generations in legislative assemblies can be defended on the basis of ideas and ideals from recent theory of deliberative democracy. From this point of view, one can argue that the number of F-representatives and their voting power are of secondary importance compared to the value of representing arguments and making relevant information available in the legislative forum. In what follows, I will elaborate these arguments.

4.1. *The Normative Legitimacy of Democratic Decisions*

From the point of view of deliberative democracy, the normative legitimacy¹⁸ of collectively binding decisions is not only the product of majority rule or a mere aggregation of preferences. This is primarily because majority rule is reason blind or insensitive to reasons.¹⁹ Rather, democratic decisions can only be regarded as just or ethically justifiable if they result from a process of thorough and reasoned public deliberation where all affected parties or their representatives have had the opportunity to participate. Furthermore, some advocates of deliberative democracy claim that the process of deliberation must satisfy certain procedural norms that are supposed to promote rational and impartial discourses.²⁰ Some of these norms are considered more closely below (in Section 4.2).

¹⁸ The term "normative legitimacy" refers in this context to what Habermas has called *anererkennungswürdigkeit*.

¹⁹ See, for example, Benhabib, 1994, p. 29; and Estlund, 1997, pp. 176–177.

²⁰ See, for example, Habermas, 1996.

In a number of cases, future generations are among the parties who are significantly affected by present democratic decisions. This seems to imply that at least democratic decisions that significantly bear upon the lives of posterity cannot be regarded as legitimate unless future people have been given a voice in the decision making process. From this line of reasoning, it seems to follow that future generations ought to be represented in legislative assemblies in cases that significantly affect them, provided that such representation is possible.²¹

If one accepts the above mentioned idea concerning the legitimacy of democratic decisions, but rejects the conclusion that posterity ought to be represented, one has to justify why one of the parties who are affected should be excluded from taking part in the decision making process through representation. In order to be in accordance with the formal principle of equality,²² such an argument must demonstrate that there are ethically relevant differences between present and future generations that can justify such exclusion (or such differential treatment). It is problematic to come up with a convincing case for such exclusion unless one is of the opinion that the moral status of future people is seriously compromised by (1) their epistemological status, and/or (2) their ontological status.²³

For the present purposes, the most important questions in regard to the *epistemological status* of future persons are the following. Do we have sufficient knowledge about the interests, needs, and life-conditions of near and distant future people in order to take their welfare into account when making decisions today? How do uncertainty and ignorance of the future affect our moral duties and responsibilities towards posterity?²⁴ There are several moral and metaethical problems pertaining to the *ontological status* of future persons, and among the most important are the following. First, since future persons, do not exist now, when the alleged burdens of responsibility fall upon the living, the following questions emerge. Can non-actual future persons have moral status (or moral standing)? Can

²¹ This conclusion also seems to follow from Jon Elster's claim that the notion of deliberative democracy "includes collective decision making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives" (Elster, 1998, p. 8). It should be noted that this line of argument can also serve as a justification for giving a voice to foreigners who are significantly affected by democratic decisions in another state. However, in contrast to future generations, foreigners and their governments do have some opportunities to influence policy-making processes in other states.

²² The *formal principle of equality* can be formulated like this: cases that are relevantly similar should be treated in a similar manner; a differential treatment requires a relevant difference.

²³ The term "epistemological and ontological status of future persons" is used by Partridge (2001).

²⁴ These problems are discussed more closely in Ekeli, 2004.

present moral agents have duties to non-existent persons, and if so, do these duties correlate with the rights of future persons? Second, present actions and policies can affect not only the welfare and life conditions of future persons, but also their existence, number, and identity. This fact about the contingency of future people raises a perplexing problem that Derek Parfit (1984) has called the “non-identity problem.” The essence of this problem is that alternative environmental policies will not make particular future individuals worse off in cases where these policies affect the identity of future populations. For example, if we choose a policy of depletion, we do not harm anybody because if we had chosen an alternative policy of conservation of resources, a different future population would exist.²⁵ This implies that we can choose policies that have bad outcomes, even very bad outcomes, yet leave no one worse off. From these reflections, the following paradox emerges: “Attempts to change conditions in the remote future have the result of causing different persons to live in that future – persons who (*qua* “different persons”) will lead lives that will not be “made better” than they otherwise would have been, even by successful efforts now to improve life conditions at that remotely future time” (Partridge, 1998, p. 82).²⁶

I do not believe that these problems pertaining to the epistemological and ontological status of future persons constitute a convincing objection against a representation of posterity. Although I will set aside these problems in the present paper, it should be underlined that, in view of the literature on intergenerational ethics, it would be controversial to claim that the epistemological and ontological status of future people significantly compromises the moral status of future generations.²⁷ If one accepts the widely held view that these problems do not seriously compromise the moral standing of future people, a good case can be made for political representation of posterity.

²⁵ This point is related to the radical contingencies attending human reproduction: “Since the choice between our two policies would affect the timing of later conceptions, some of the people who are later born would owe their existence to our choice of one of the two policies. If we had chosen the other policy, these particular people would never have existed. And the proportion of those later born who owe their existence to our choice would, like ripples in a pool, steadily grow. We can plausibly assume that, after three centuries, there would be no one living in our community who would have been born whichever policy we chose. (It may help to think about this question: how many of us could truly claim, ‘Even if railways and motor cars had never been invented, I would still have been born?’)” (Parfit, 1984, p. 361).

²⁶ In addition to Parfit’s extensive analysis of the non-identity problem, there are a number of interesting discussions of this problem and its implications. See, for example, Schwartz (1978); Kavka (1982); Grey (1996); Partridge (1998); and Carter (2001).

²⁷ See, for example, Kavka (1982); Parfit (1984); Malnes (1995); de-Shalit (1995); Partridge (1998, 2001); Carter (2001); Shrader-Frechette (2002:ch. 5); and Ekeli (2004).

4.2. *Preconditions for Rational and Impartial Discourses*

In what follows, I will argue that representation of posterity in legislative assemblies can be defended on the basis of recent theory of deliberative democracy because such representation can contribute to more rational and impartial deliberations and decisions in legislative forums. An important precondition for a *rational discourse* is that an open and critical forum of reasoned discussion is established where relevant information and facts are available to the participants. In order to create such a forum, the participants should have a right to make proposals and put forward arguments for and against the proposals under consideration. Second, they ought to have a duty to justify their views upon request, unless they can provide grounds that justify avoiding giving a justification. Third, it is important that the participants have access to information about how different policy proposals can affect the parties involved. Fourth, one must be willing to revise one's political and moral views in response to new insights, scientific and empirical information, or interpretations of both the insights and information. This norm concerns the proper motivation of the participants, and it implies that one should take seriously the reasons one's opponents give and let disagreements be settled by the force of the better argument. Here it must be pointed out that even if a forum of discussion is established along these lines, one cannot guarantee that rational or enlightened decisions will be made. Rather, the aim is to promote a process of deliberation that renders rational decisions possible.²⁸

Representation of future generations can contribute to rational discourses in legislative assemblies in several ways. Firstly, such spokespersons can present proposals and arguments that might not have been introduced and taken into consideration in the absence of formal representation of posterity. Secondly, the F-representatives can make relevant information (about values, facts, problems, solutions, and options) available to the participants in the legislative assembly. In this way, formal representation of posterity may lead to a discussion that might lessen the problem of bounded rationality – the problem that our knowledge, imagination, and reasoning abilities are limited and fallible. The reason for this is that F-representatives may think of possibilities and problems that would not have occurred to the other participants in the legislative forum. To the extent that the F-representatives play this role in the process of deliberation, this will improve the basis of information and enhance the level of reflection among the decision-makers. From this point of view, the number of F-representatives and their

²⁸ This is not a complete list of requirements that a rational discourse must satisfy. An interesting discussion of such requirements that has played an important role in Habermas's discourse ethics is found in Alexy (1983, 1990).

voting power are of secondary importance compared to the significance of making relevant proposals, information, and arguments available in the legislative forum.

An important precondition for an *impartial discourse* is that the interests and needs of all affected parties are taken into account when alternative proposals and their consequences are under consideration. This presupposes that the participants in the discourse have knowledge about how different policies will affect the interests and needs of all the involved, and that they try to imagine themselves in the place of the others. If this is correct, it seems to count in favor of representation of various affected parties or groups (at least to the extent that this is possible – and desirable all things considered).²⁹ Besides, the representatives ought to be given the opportunity to determine the agenda and provide information about the interests and needs of the parties that they represent. Such representation can contribute to a more thorough and informed discourse about relevant policy proposals and their likely effects on various groups. Moreover, in such a forum of deliberation, the participants will be “forced” or encouraged to put forward proposals and arguments that are impartial in the sense that they are acceptable or reasonable to all the parties involved. This point rests on central assumptions in theories of deliberative democracy:

Among advocates of discursive [or deliberative] democracy, it is a familiar proposition that having to defend our positions publicly makes us suppress narrowly self-interested reasons for action and highlight public-spirited reasons in their place. We must do so, at least in our public explanations, if we want to give reasons to which we expect anyone besides ourselves to assent. ... [T]here will always be a certain amount of *anticipatory internalization* in such settings. Those choosing actions and knowing that they will have to be defended in the public forum will ask themselves, “How would I justify this to X?”, even before X asks for an explanation (Goodin, 1996, p. 846, italics added).

These assumptions about public deliberation and anticipatory internalization do not rule out that the participants might be hypocritical or strategic. However, as pointed out by Elster, the “civilizing force of hypocrisy” may produce desirable results.³⁰ Over time, the psychological mechanism of self-censorship might induce hypocritical participants to actually adopt “reasonable” positions to which they earlier paid only lip-service. Further, self-censorship may even prevent self-interested proposals from coming on the voting agenda.³¹

²⁹ Interesting discussions of deliberative democracy and group representation are found in Sunstein (1991) and Phillips (1995).

³⁰ See Elster (1986, pp. 112–113, 1995).

³¹ See Fearon (1998).

Representation of future generations can contribute to the promotion of such impartial discourses in legislative assemblies in several ways. First, their spokespersons may ensure that issues affecting future people are placed on the agenda. Second, such representatives can contribute to a more thorough discussion of such issues. Third, the presence of F-representatives may encourage policy proposals and arguments that are impartial in the sense that the needs of both present and future generations are taken into account. In this context, I believe that the civilizing force of hypocrisy will play a role because it may induce participants in assembly debates to suppress narrowly self-interested and short-sighted proposals and arguments that do not take future interests into consideration. Over time, hypocritical participants might even adopt the more impartial positions to which they earlier paid only lip-service. Fourth, representation of posterity can lead to an exchange of information about interests, needs, relevant ends, and means that makes it easier for the participants to understand how different proposals will affect the needs and life-conditions of future generations. Despite the fact that future people cannot be what Goodin has called “communicatively present,” the F-representatives can make the needs of posterity “imaginatively present” in the minds of the deliberators.³² In other words, the communicative presence of spokespersons can make future people more imaginatively present in the minds of the legislators. Therefore, formal representation of posterity can induce the process of internalization of future interests among the legislators.

In light of the foregoing considerations, one can draw the following conclusion. Representation of future people cannot guarantee that democratic majorities will not make decisions that will harm posterity. Nevertheless, such representation can be regarded as a reasonably effective mechanism in order to ensure that future interests and needs are taken into account in present decision-making processes. Furthermore, the proposed representative structures can contribute to more rational and impartial discourses before decisions are made through voting. This can in turn lead to more rational and impartial decision outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed whether some seats in democratically elected legislative assemblies ought to be reserved for representatives of posterity. In order to answer this question, I have considered two competing models for political representation of future generations – Dobson’s restricted franchise

³² The distinction between “communicative presence” and “imaginative presence” is discussed in Goodin, 2000.

model and my extended franchise model. In view of central ideals in deliberative democracy, it has been argued that my model has several advantages compared with Dobson's model. Nevertheless, the proposed model of representation faces several difficult problems. The most important is probably the problem of the representative legitimacy of the F-representatives. Since it is impossible for future generations to authorize their representatives to act on their behalf and hold them democratically accountable, authorization and accountability are absent as sources of representative legitimacy.

Despite such problems, it has been argued that giving posterity a voice in legislative assemblies can be defended on the basis of fundamental ideas and ideals in recent theory of deliberative democracy. The first reason for this is that in a number of cases democratic decisions cannot be regarded as normatively legitimate from the point of view of deliberative democracy, unless future people is given a voice. The second reason is that representation of posterity can contribute to more rational and impartial deliberations and decisions in legislative assemblies. In this connection, I have argued that the extended franchise model represents an institutional framework that provides an important supplement and complement to Goodin's model of incorporated interests. This is because it can initiate an educative process that may induce both citizens and legislators to internalize the interests and needs of future generations. In this way, the proposed new representative structures may help overcome the problem that "the future whispers while the present shouts" (Gore, 1992, p. 170).

REFERENCES

- Alexy, R., *Theorie der juristischen Argumentation* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1983).
- Alexy, R., "Theory of Practical Discourse," in S. Benhabib and F. Dallmayr (eds.), *The Communicative Ethics Controversy* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp. 151-190.
- Beckerman, W. and J. Pasek, *Justice, Posterity, and the Environment* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001).
- Benhabib, S., "Deliberation Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy," *Constellations* 1 (1994), 26-52.
- Carter, A., "Can We Harm Future People?" *Environmental Values* 10 (4), (2001), pp. 429-454.
- Cohen, J., "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in A. Hamlin and B. Pettit (eds.), *The Good Polity* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1989), pp. 17-34.
- Dobson, A., "Representative Democracy and the Environment," in W. Lafferty and J. Meadowcroft (eds.), *Democracy and the Environment* (Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 1996), pp. 124-139.

GIVING A VOICE TO POSTERITY

449

- Dryzek, J., *Discursive Democracy. Politics, Policy, and Political Science* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990).
- Eckersley, R., "The Discourse Ethic and the Problem of Representing Nature," *Environmental Politics* (1999) 8 (2), 24–49.
- Ekeli, K. S., "Environmental Risks, Uncertainty and Intergenerational Ethics," *Environmental Values* 13 (4), (2004) 421–448.
- Elster, J., "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory," in J. Elster and A. Hylland (eds.), *Foundations of Social Choice Theory* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986), pp. 103–132.
- Elster, J., "Strategic Uses of Argument," in K. Arrow, R. Mnookin, L. Ross. A. Tversky and R. Wilson. (ed.), *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* (Norton, New York, 1995), pp. 236–257.
- Elster, J., "Introduction," in J. Elster (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), pp. 1–18.
- Estlund, D., "Beyond Fairness and Deliberation: The Epistemic Dimension of Democratic Authority," in J. Bohman and W. Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 173–204.
- Fearon, J., "Deliberation as Discussion," in J. Elster. (ed.), *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), pp. 44–68.
- Gerber, E. R. and J. E. Jackson, "Endogenous Preferences and the Study of Institutions," *American Political Science Review* 87 (3), (1993) 639–656.
- Goodin, R. E., "Enfranchising the Earth, and its Alternatives," *Political Studies* 44 (1996), pp. 835–849.
- Goodin, R. E., "Democratic Deliberation Within," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (1), pp. (2000) 81–109.
- Gore, A., *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1992).
- Grey, W., "Possible Persons and the Problems of Posterity," *Environmental Values* 5 (2), (1996) pp. 161–179.
- Gutmann, A. and D. Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1996).
- Habermas, J., *Between Facts and Norms* (MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996).
- Kavka, G., "The Paradox of Future Individuals," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11 (2), (1982) pp. 93–112.
- Kavka, G. and V. Warren, "Political Representation for Future Generations," in R. Elliot and A. Gare (eds.), *Environmental Philosophy* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1983), pp. 21–39.
- Malnes, R., *Valuing the Environment* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995).
- Manin, B., "On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation," *Political Theory* 15 (3), (1987) pp. 338–368.
- Markus, G. B. and P. E. Converse, "A Dynamic Simultaneous Equation Model of Electoral Choice," *American Political Science Review* 73 (4), (1979) pp. 1055–1070.
- O'Neill, J., "Representing People, Representing Nature, Representing the World," *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 19 (2001), pp. 483–500.
- Pachlke, R., *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989).
- Parfit, D., *Reasons and Persons* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984).

- Partridge, E., "Should We Seek a Better Future?" *Ethics and the Environment* 3 (1), (1998) 81–95.
- Partridge, E., "Future Generations," in D. Jamieson (ed.), *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2001), pp. 377–389.
- Phillips, A., *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995).
- Pitkin, H. F., *The Concept of Representation* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967).
- Przeworski, A., "Deliberation and Ideological Domination," in J. Elster (ed.), *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), pp. 140–160.
- Rawls, J., *Political Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1993).
- Saward, M., "Making Democratic Connections: Political Equality, Deliberation and Direct Democracy," *Acta Politica* 36 (4), (2001) pp. 361–379.
- Schwartz, T., "Obligations to Posterity," in R.I. Sikora and B. Barry (eds.), *Obligations to Future Generations* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 3–13.
- de-Shalit, A., *Why Posterity Matters. Environmental Policies and Future Generations* (Routledge, London, 1995).
- Shapiro, M., "The Success of Judicial Review and Democracy," in M. Shapiro and A. Stone Sweet (eds.), *Law, Politics and Judicialization* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002), pp. 149–183.
- Shrader-Frechette, K., *Environmental Justice. Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002).
- Smith, G., "Taking Deliberation Seriously: Institutional Design and Green Politics," *Environmental Politics* 10 (3), (2001) pp. 72–93.
- Stein, T., "Does the Constitutional and Democratic System Work? The Ecological Crisis as a Challenge to the Political Order of Constitutional Democracy," *Constellations* 4 (3), (1998) pp. 420–449.
- Sunstein, C., "Preferences and Politics," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20 (1), (1991) 3–34.
- Urbinati, N., "Representation as Advocacy: A Study of Democratic Deliberation," *Political Theory* 28 (6), (2000) pp. 758–786.

University of Stavanger
4036 Stavanger
Norway
E-mail: kristian.ekeli@uis.no

Part VI
Preservation, Development
and Sustainability



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

[29]

Feeding People versus Saving Nature?

HOLMES ROLSTON III

Holmes Rolston III is University Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Colorado State University. He is the author of five books, including: *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* (Random House and McGraw-Hill); *Philosophy Gone Wild* (Prometheus); *Environmental Ethics* (Temple University Press); *Conserving Natural Value* (Columbia University Press).

When we must choose between feeding the hungry and conserving nature, people ought to come first. A bumper sticker reads: Hungry loggers eat spotted owls. That pinpoints an ethical issue, pure and simple, and often one where the humanist protagonist, taking high moral ground, intends to put the environmentalist on the defensive. You wouldn't let the Ethiopians starve to save some butterfly, would you?

"Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development." So the *Rio Declaration* begins. Once this was to be an *Earth Charter*, but the developing nations were more interested in getting the needs of their poor met. The developed nations are wealthy enough to be concerned about saving nature. The developing nations want the anthropocentrism, loud and clear. These humans, they add, "are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature," but there too they seem as concerned with their entitlements as with any care for nature.¹ Can we fault them for it?

We have to be circumspect. To isolate so simple a trade-off as hungry people versus nature is perhaps artificial. If too far abstract-

ed from the complex circumstances of decision, we may not be facing any serious operational issue. When we have simplified the question, it may have become, minus its many qualifications, a different question. The gestalt configures the question, and the same question reconfigured can be different. So we must analyze the general matrix, and then confront the more particular people-versus-nature issue.

Humans win? Nature loses? After analysis, sometimes it turns out that humans are not really winning, if they are sacrificing the nature that is their life support system. Humans win by conserving nature—and these winners include the poor and the hungry. “In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.”² After all, food has to be produced by growing it in some reasonably healthy natural system, and the clean water that the poor need is also good for fauna and flora. Extractive reserves give people an incentive to conserve. Tourism can often benefit both the local poor and the wildlife, as well as tourists. One ought to seek win-win solutions wherever one can. Pragmatically, these are often the only kind likely to succeed.

Yet there are times when nature is sacrificed for human development; most development is of this kind. By no means all is warranted, but that which gets people fed seems basic and urgent. Then nature should lose and people win. Or are there times when at least some humans should lose and some nature should win? We are here interested in these latter occasions. Can we ever say that we should save nature rather than feed people?

Feed People First? Do We? Ought We?

“Feed people first!” That has a ring of righteousness. The *Rio Declaration* insists, “All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement.”³ In the biblical parable of the great judgment, the righteous had ministered to the needy, and Jesus welcomes them to their reward. “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink.” Those who refused to help are damned (Matthew 28:31–46). The vision of heaven is that “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more” (Revelation 7.16), and Jesus teaches his disciples to pray that this will of God be done on earth, as it is in heaven. “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 5.11). These are such basic values, if there is to be any ethics at all, surely food comes first.

Or does it? If giving others their daily bread were always the first concern, the Christians would never have built an organ or a sanctuary with a stained glass window, but rather always given all to the poor. There is also the biblical story of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with expensive ointment. When the disciples complained that it should have been sold and given to the poor, Jesus replied, "you always have the poor with you. She has done a beautiful thing." (Matthew 26.10-11). While the poor are a continuing concern, with whom Jesus demonstrated ample solidarity, there are other commendable values in human life, "beautiful things," in Jesus' phrase. The poor are always there, and if we did nothing else of value until there were no more poor, we would do nothing else of value at all.

Eradicating poverty is an indispensable requirement! Yes, but set these ideals beside the plain fact that we all daily prefer other values. Every time we buy a Christmas gift for a wife or husband, or go to a symphony concert, or give a college education to a child, or drive a late model car home, or turn on the air conditioner, we spend money that might have helped to eradicate poverty. We mostly choose to do things we value more than feeding the hungry.

An ethicist may reply, yes, that is the fact of the matter. But no normative ought follows from the description of this behavior. We ought not to behave so. But such widespread behavior, engaged in almost universally by persons who regard themselves as being ethical, including readers of this article, is strong evidence that we in fact not only have these norms but think we ought to have them. To be sure, we also think that charity is appropriate, and we censure those who are wholly insensitive to the plight of others. But we place decisions here on a scale of degree, and we do not feel guilty about all these other values we pursue, while yet some people somewhere on earth are starving.

If one were to advocate always feeding the hungry first, doing nothing else until no one in the world is hungry, this would paralyze civilization. People would not have invented writing, or smelted iron, or written music, or invented airplanes. Plato would not have written his dialogues, or Aquinas the *Summa Theologica*; Edison would not have discovered the electric light bulb or Einstein the theory of relativity. We both do and ought to devote ourselves to various worthy causes, while yet persons in our own communities and elsewhere go hungry.

A few of these activities redound subsequently to help the poor, but the possible feedback to alleviating poverty cannot be the sole justification of advancing these multiple cultural values. Let us remember this when we ask whether saving natural values might sometimes take precedence. Our moral systems in fact do not teach

us to feed the poor first. The Ten Commandments do not say that; the Golden Rule does not; Kant did not say that; nor does the utilitarian greatest good for the greatest number imply that. Eradicating poverty may be indispensable but not always prior to all other cultural values. It may not always be prior to conserving natural values either.

Choosing for People to Die

But food is absolutely vital. "Thou shalt not kill" is one of the commandments. Next to the evil of taking life is taking the sustenance for life. Is not saving nature, thereby preventing hunting, harvesting, or development by those who need the produce of that land to put food in their mouths, almost like killing? Surely one ought not to choose for someone else to die, an innocent who is only trying to eat; everyone has a right to life. To fence out the hungry is choosing that people will die. That can't be right.

Or can it? In broader social policy we make many decisions that cause people to die. When in 1988 we increased the national speed limit on rural Interstate highways from 55 to 65 miles per hour, we chose for 400 persons to die each year.⁴ We decide against hiring more police, though if we did some murders would be avoided. The city council spends that money on a new art museum, or to give the schoolteachers a raise. Congress decides not to pass a national health care program that would subsidize medical insurance for some now uninsured, who cannot otherwise afford it; and some such persons will, in result, fail to get, timely medical care and die of preventable diseases.

We may decide to leave existing air pollution standards in place because it is expensive for industry to install new scrubbers, even though there is statistical evidence that a certain number of persons will contract diseases and die prematurely. All money budgeted for the National Endowment for the Humanities, and almost all that budgeted for the National Science Foundation, could be spent to prevent the deaths of babies that die from malnutrition. We do not know exactly who will die, but we know that some will; we often have reasonable estimates how many. The situation would be similar, should we choose to save nature rather than to feed people.

U.S. soldiers go abroad to stabilize an African nation, from which starving refugees are fleeing, and we feel good about it. All those unfortunate people cannot come here, but at least we can go there and help. All this masks, however, how we really choose to fight others rather than to feed them. The developed countries spend

as much on military power in a year as the poorest two billion people on Earth earn in total income. The developed countries in 1990 provided 56 billion dollars in economic aid to the poorer countries but they also sold 36 billion dollars worth of arms to them. At a cost of less than half their military expenditures, the developing countries could provide a package of basic health care services and clinical care that would save 10 million lives a year. World military spending in 1992 exceeded 600 billion dollars. U.S. military spending accounted for nearly half this amount, yet in the United States one person in seven lives below the poverty line and over 37 million people lack any form of health care coverage.⁵ These are choices that cause people to die, both abroad and at home.

But such spending, a moralist critic will object, is wrong. This only reports what people do decide, not what they ought to decide. Yes, but few are going to argue that we ought to spend nothing on military defense until all the poor are fed, clothed, and housed. We believe that many of the values achieved in the United States, which place us among the wealthier nations, are worth protecting, even while others starve. Europeans and others will give similar arguments. Say if you like that this only puts our self-interest over theirs, but in fact we all do act to protect what we value, even if this decision results in death for those beyond our borders. That seems to mean that a majority of citizens think such decisions are right.

Wealthy and poverty-stricken nations alike put up borders across which the poor are forbidden to pass. Rich nations will not let them in; their own governments will not let them out. We may have misgivings about this on both sides, but if we believe in immigration laws at all, we, on the richer side of the border, think that protecting our lifestyle counts more than their betterment, even if they just want to be better fed. If we let anyone who pleased enter the United States, and gave them free passage, hundreds of millions would come. Already 30 percent of our population growth is by immigration, legal and illegal. Sooner or later we must fence them out, or face the loss of prosperity that we value. We may not think this is always right, but when one faces the escalating numbers that would swamp the United States, it is hard not to conclude that it is sometimes right. Admitting refugees is humane, but it lets such persons flee their own national problems and does not contribute to any long-term solutions in the nations from which they emigrate. Meanwhile, people die as a result of such decisions.

Some of these choices address the question whether we ought to save nature if this causes people to die. Inside our U.S. boundaries, we have a welfare system, refusing to let anyone starve. Fortunately, we are wealthy enough to afford this as well as nature

conservation. But if it came to this, we would think it wrong-headed to put animals (or art, or well-paid teachers) over starving people. Does that not show that, as domestic policy, we take care of our own? We feed people first—or at least second, after military defence. Yet we let foreigners die, when we are not willing to open our five hundred wilderness areas, nearly 100 million acres, to Cubans and Ethiopians.

Hunger and Social Justice

The welfare concept introduces another possibility, that the wealthy should be taxed to feed the poor. We should do that first, rather than cut into much else that we treasure, possibly losing our wildlife, or wilderness areas, or giving up art, or underpaying the teachers. In fact, there is a way greatly to relieve this tragedy, could there be a just distribution of the goods of culture, now often so inequitably distributed. Few persons would need to go without enough if we could use the produce of the already domesticated landscape justly and charitably. It is better to try to fix this problem where it arises, within society, than to try to enlarge the sphere of society by the sacrifice of remnant natural values, by, say, opening up the wilderness areas to settlement. Indeed, the latter only postpones the problem.

Peoples in the South (a code word for the lesser developed countries, or the poor) complain about the overconsumption of peoples in the North (the industrial rich), often legitimately so. But Brazil has within its own boundaries the most skewed income distribution in the world. The U.S. ratio between personal income for the top 20 percent of people to the bottom 20 percent is 9 to 1; the ratio in Brazil is 26 to 1. Just one percent of Brazilians control 45 percent of the agricultural land. The biggest 20 landowners own more land between them than the 3.3 million smallest farmers. With the Amazon still largely undeveloped, there is already more arable land per person in Brazil than in the United States. Much land is held for speculation; 330 million hectares of farm land, an area larger than India, is lying idle. The top 10 percent of Brazilians spend 51 percent of the national income.⁶ This anthropocentric inequity ought to be put "at the center of concern" when we decide about saving nature versus feeding people.

Save the Amazon! No! The howler monkeys and toucans may delight tourists, but we ought not save them if people need to eat. Such either-or choices mask how marginalized peoples are forced onto marginal lands; and those lands become easily stressed, both because the lands are by nature marginal for agriculture, range, and

life support, and also because by human nature marginalized peoples find it difficult to plan for the long-range. They are caught up in meeting their immediate needs; their stress forces them to stress a fragile landscape.

Prime agricultural or residential lands can also be stressed to produce more, because there is a growing population to feed, or to grow an export crop, because there is an international debt to pay. Prime agricultural lands in southern Brazil, formerly used for growing food and worked by tenants who lived on these lands and ate their produce, as well as sent food into the cities, have been converted to growing coffee as an export crop, using mechanized farming, to help pay Brazil's massive debt, contracted by a military government since overthrown. Peoples forced off these lands were resettled in the Amazon basin, aided by development schemes fostered by the military government, resettled on lands really not suitable for agriculture. The integrity of the Amazon, to say nothing of the integrity of these peoples, is being sacrificed to cover for misguided loans. Meanwhile the wealthy in Brazil pay little or no income tax that might be used for such loan repayment.

The world is full enough of societies that have squandered their resources, inequitably distributed wealth, degraded their landscapes, and who will be tempted to jeopardize what natural values remain as an alternative to solving hard social problems. The decision about social welfare, poor people over nature, usually lies in the context of another decision, often a tacit one, to protect vested interests, wealthy people over poor people, wealthy people who have exploited nature already, ready to exploit anything they can. At this point in our logic, en route to any conclusion such as let-people-starve, we regularly reach an if-then, go-to decision point, where before we face the people-over-nature choice we have to reaffirm or let stand the wealthy-over-poor choice.

South Africa is seeking an ethic of ecojustice enabling five million privileged whites and twenty nine million exploited blacks (as well as several million underprivileged "Coloureds") to live in harmony on their marvelously rich but often fragile landscape.⁷ Whites earn nearly ten times the per capita income of blacks. White farmers, 50,000 of them, own 70 percent of farmland; 700,000 black farmers own 13 percent of the land (17% other). Black ownership of land was long severely restricted by law. Forced relocations of blacks and black birth rates have combined to give the homelands, small areas carved out within the South African nation, an extremely high-average population density. When ownership patterns in the homelands are combined with those in the rest of the nation, land ownership is as skewed as anywhere on Earth. Compounding the problem

is that the black population is growing, and is already more than ten times what it was before the Europeans came.

The land health is poor. South African farmers lose twenty tons of topsoil to produce one ton of crops. Water resources are running out; the limited wetlands in an essentially arid nation are exploited for development; water is polluted by unregulated industry. Natal, one of the nation's greenest and most glorious areas, is especially troubled with polluted winds. Everywhere, herbicides float downwind with adverse human, vegetative, and wildlife effects on nontarget organisms.

With an abundance of coal, South Africa generates 60 percent of the electricity on the African continent, sold at some of the cheapest rates in the world, although less than a third of South Africans have electricity. The Eskom coal-burning power plants in the Transvaal are the worst offenders in air pollution, leaving the high veld as polluted as was Eastern Germany, also threatening an area producing 50 percent of South Africa's timber industry and 50 percent of the nation's high potential agricultural soils. As a result of all this, many blacks go poorly nourished; some, in weakened condition, catch diseases and die.

What is the solution? South Africa also has some of the finest wildlife conservation reserves in Africa. Some are public; some are private. They are visited mostly by white tourists, often from abroad. One hears the cry that conserving elitist reserves, in which the wealthy enjoy watching lions and wildebeest, cannot be justified where poor blacks are starving. What South Africa needs is development, not conservation. In an industry-financed study, Brian Huntley, Roy Siegfried, and Clem Sunter conclude: "What is needed is a much larger cake, not a sudden change in the way it is cut."⁸ One way to get a bigger cake would be to take over the lands presently held as wildlife reserves.

But more cake, just as unequally cut, is not the right solution in a nation that already stresses the carrying capacity of its landscape. *Laissez-faire* capitalists propose growth so that every one can become more prosperous, oblivious to the obvious fact that even the present South African relationship to the landscape is neither sustainable nor healthy. They seem humane; they do not want anyone to starve. The rhetoric, and even the intent, is laudable. At the same time, they want growth because this will avoid redistribution of wealth. The result, under the rubric of feeding people versus saving nature, is in fact favoring the wealthy over the poor.

What is happening is that an unjust lack of sharing between whites and blacks is destroying the green. It would be foolish for all, even for white South Africans acting in their own self-interest, fur-

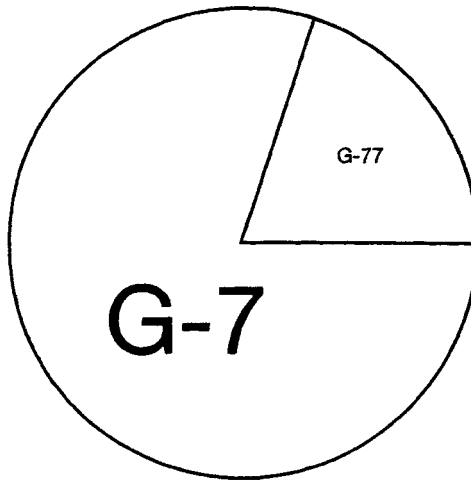


Figure 1 Proportionate Production and Consumption among Nations.

ther to jeopardize environmental health, rather than to look first and resolutely to solving their social problems. It would not really be right, if South Africans were to open their magnificent wildlife reserves, seemingly in the interests of the poor, while the cake remains as inequitably divided as ever. Fortunately, many South Africans have realized the deeper imperative, and the recent historic election there, and efforts toward a new constitution, promise deep social changes. This, in turn, will make possible a more intelligent conservation of natural values.⁹

In the more fortunate nations, we may distribute wealth more equitably, perhaps through taxes or minimum wage laws, or by labor unions, or educational opportunities, and we do have in place the welfare systems referred to earlier, refusing to let anyone starve. But lest we seem too righteous, we also recall that we have such policies only domestically. The international picture puts this in a different light. There are two major blocs, the G-7 nations (the Group of 7, the big nations of North America, Europe, and Japan, "the North"), and the G-77 nations, once 77 but now including some 128 lesser developed nations, often south of the industrial north. The G-7 nations hold about one fifth of the world's five billion persons, and they produce and consume about four fifths of all goods and services. The G-77 nations, with four fifths of the world's people, produce and consume one fifth. (See figure 1.) For every person added to the population of the North, twenty are added in the South. For every dollar of

economic growth per person in the South, 20 dollars accrue in the North.¹⁰

The distribution problem is complex. Earth's natural resources are unevenly distributed by nature. Diverse societies have often taken different directions of development; they have different governments, ideologies, and religions; they have made different social choices, valued material prosperity differently. Typically, where there is agricultural and industrial development, people think of this as an impressive achievement. Pies have to be produced before they can be divided, and who has produced this pie? Who deserves the pie? People ought to get what they earn. Fairness nowhere commands rewarding all parties equally; justice is giving each his or her due. We treat equals equally; we treat unequals equitably, and that typically means unequal treatment proportionately to merit. There is nothing evidently unfair in the pie diagram, not at least until we have inquired about earnings. Some distribution patterns reflect achievement. Not all of the asymmetrical distribution is a result of social injustice.

Meanwhile, it is difficult to look at a distribution chart and not think that something is unfair. Is some of the richness on one side related to the poverty on the other? Regularly, the poor come off poorly when they bargain with the rich; and wealth that originates as impressive achievement can further accumulate through exploitation. Certainly many of the hungry people have worked just as hard as many of the rich.

Some will say that what the poorer nations need to do is to imitate the productive people. Unproductive people need to learn how to make more pies. Then they can feed themselves. Those in the G-7 nations who emphasize the earnings model tend to recommend to the G-77 nations that they produce more, often offering to help them produce by investments which can also be productive for the G-7 nations. Those in the G-77 nations do indeed wish to produce, but they also see the exploitation and realize that the problem is sharing as well as producing. Meanwhile the growth graphs caution us that producing can be as much part of the problem as part of the solution. One way to think of the circular pie chart is that this is planet Earth, and we do not have any way of producing a bigger planet. We could, though, feed more people by sacrificing more nature.

Meanwhile too, any such decisions take place inside this 1/5-gets-4/5ths, 4/5ths-gets-1/5 picture. So it is not just the Brazilians and the South Africans, but all of us in the United States, Europe, and Japan as well that have to face an if-then, go-to decision point, reaffirming and or letting stand the wealthy-over-poor division of the Earth's pie that we enjoy. This is what stings when we see the

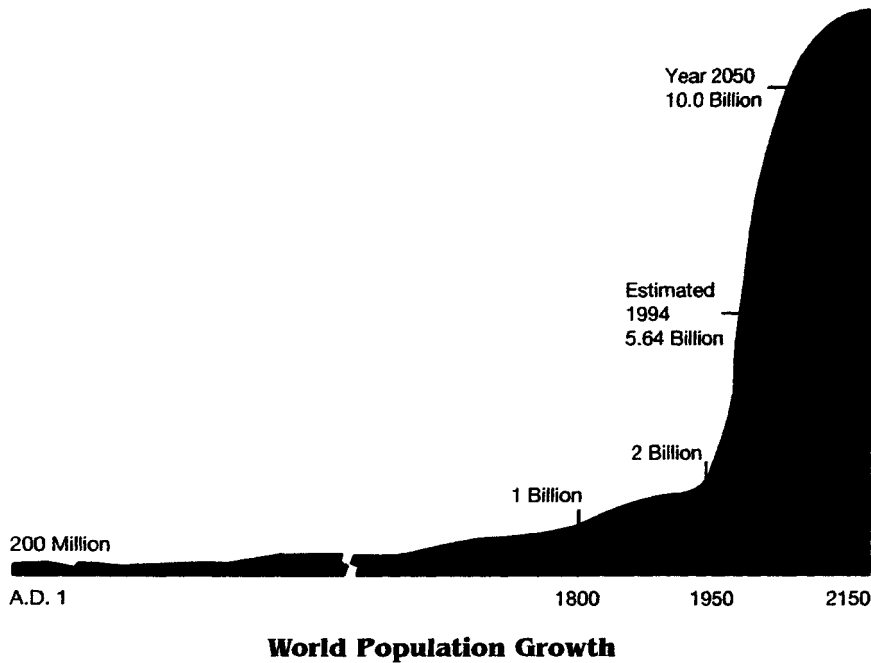


Figure 2 Adapted from data in U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1994* (114th edition). Washington, DC, 1994. Page 850.

bumper sticker ethical injunction: "Live simply that others may simply live."

Escalating Human Populations

Consider human population growth. (See Figure 2.) Not only have the numbers of persons grown, their expectations have grown, so that we must superimpose one exploding curve on top of another. A superficial reading of such a graph is that humans really start winning big in the twentieth century. There are lots of them, and they want, and many get, lots of things. If one is a moral humanist, this can seem a good thing. Wouldn't it be marvelous if all could get what they want, and none hunger and thirst any more?

But when we come to our senses, we realize that this kind of winning, if it keeps on escalating, is really losing. Humans will lose, and nature will be destroyed as well. Cultures have become consumptive, with ever-escalating insatiable desires, overlaid on ever-escalating population growth. Culture does not know how to say "Enough!" and that is not satisfactory. Starkly put, the growth of cul-

ture has become cancerous. That is hardly a metaphor, for a cancer is essentially an explosion of unregulated growth. Feeding people always seems humane, but, when we face up to what is really going on, by just feeding people, without attention to the larger social results, we could be feeding a kind of cancer.

One can say that where there is a hungry mouth, one should do what it takes to get food into it. But when there are two mouths there the next day, and four the day after that, and sixteen the day after that, one needs a more complex answer. The population of Egypt was less than 3 million for over five millennia, fluctuating between 1.5 to 2.5 million, even when Napoleon went there in the early 1800s. Today the population of Egypt is about 55 million. Egypt has to import more than half its food. The effects on nature, both on land health and on wildlife, have been adversely proportional.

If, in this picture, we look at individual persons, caught up in this uncontrolled growth, and if we try to save nature, some persons will go hungry. Surely, that is a bad thing. Would anyone want to say that such persons ought not to sacrifice nature, if needs be, to alleviate such harm as best they can? From their perspective, they are only doing what humans have always done, making a resourceful use of nature to meet their own needs. Isn't that a good thing anymore? Such persons are doomed, unless they can capture natural values.

But here we face a time-bound truth, in which too much of a good thing becomes a bad thing. We have to figure in where such persons are located on the population curve, and realize that a good thing when human numbers are manageable is no longer a good thing when such a person is really another cell of cancerous growth. That sounds cruel, and it is tragic, but it does not cease to be true for these reasons. For a couple to have two children may be a blessing; but the tenth child is a tragedy. When the child comes, one has to be as humane as possible, but one will only be making the best of a tragic situation, and if the tenth child is reared, and has ten children in turn, that will only multiply the tragedy. The quality of human lives deteriorates; the poor get poorer. Natural resources are further stressed; ecosystem health and integrity degenerate; and this compounds the losses again—a lose-lose situation. In a social system misfitted to its landscape, one's wins can only be temporary in a losing human ecology.

Even if there were an equitable distribution of wealth, the human population cannot go on escalating without people becoming all equally poor. Of the 90 million new people who will come on board planet Earth this year, 85 million will appear in the Third World, the countries least able to support such population growth. At the same time, each North American will consume 200 times as much energy,

and many other resources. The 5 million new people in the industrial countries will put as much strain on the environment as the 85 million new poor. There are three problems: overpopulation, overconsumption, and underdistribution. Sacrificing nature for development does not solve any of these problems, none at all. It only brings further loss. The poor, after a meal for a day or two, perhaps a decade or two, are soon hungry all over again, only now poorer still because their natural wealth is also gone.

To say that we ought always to feed the poor first commits a good-better-best fallacy. If a little is good, more must be better, most is best. If feeding some humans is good, feeding more is better. And more. And more! Feeding all of them is best? That sounds right. We can hardly bring ourselves to say that anyone ought to starve. But we reach a point of diminishing returns, when the goods put at threat lead us to wonder.

Endangered Natural Values

Natural values are endangered at every scale: global, regional, and local, at levels of ecosystems, species, organisms, populations, fauna and flora, terrestrial and marine, charismatic megafauna down to mollusks and beetles. This is true in both developed and developing nations, though we have under discussion here places where poverty threatens biodiversity.

Humans now control 40 percent of the planet's land-based primary net productivity, that is, the basic plant growth that captures the energy on which everything else depends.¹¹ If the human population doubles again, the capture will rise to 60 to 80 percent, and little habitat will remain for natural forms of life that cannot be accommodated after we have put people first. Humans do not use the lands they have domesticated effectively. A World Bank study found that 35 percent of the Earth's land has now become degraded.¹² Daniel Hillel, in a soils study, concludes, "Present yields are extremely low in many of the developing countries, and as they can be boosted substantially and rapidly, there should be no need to reclaim new land and to encroach further upon natural habitats."¹³

Africa is a case in point, and Madagascar epitomizes Africa's future. Its fauna and flora evolved independently from the mainland continent; there are 30 primates, all lemurs; the reptiles and amphibians are 90 percent endemic, including two thirds of all the chameleons of the world, and 10,000 plant species, of which 80 percent are endemic, including a thousand kinds of orchids. Humans came there about 1,500 years ago and lived with the fauna and flora more or less intact until this century. Now an escalating population

of impoverished Malagasy people rely heavily on slash-and-burn agriculture, and the forest cover is one third of the original (27.6 million acres to 9.4 million acres), most of the loss occurring since 1950.¹⁴ Madagascar is the most eroded nation on Earth, and little or none of the fauna and flora is safely conserved. Population is expanding at 3.2 percent a year; remaining forest is shrinking at 3 percent, almost all to provide for the expanding population. Are we to say that none ought to be conserved until after no person is hungry?

Tigers are sliding toward extinction. Populations have declined 95 percent in this century; the two main factors are loss of habitat and a ferocious black market in bones and other body parts used in traditional medicine and folklore in China, Taiwan, and Korea, uses that are given no medical credence. Ranthambhore National Park in Rajasthan, India, is a tiger sanctuary; there were 40 tigers during the late 1980s, reduced in a few years by human pressures—illicit cattle grazing and poaching—to 20 to 25 tigers today. There are 200,000 Indians within three miles of the core of the park—more than double the population when the park was launched, 21 years ago. Most depend on wood from the 150 square miles of park to cook their food. They graze in and around the park some 150,000 head of scrawny cattle, buffalo, goats, and camels. The cattle impoverish habitat and carry diseases to the ungulates that are the tiger's prey; base. In May 1993, a young tigress gave birth to four cubs; that month 316 babies were born in the villages surrounding the park.¹⁵

The tigers may be doomed, but ought they to be? Consider, for instance, that there are minimal reforestation efforts, or that cattle dung can be used for fuel with much greater efficiency than is being done, or that, in an experimental herd of jersey and holstein cattle there, the yield of milk increased ten times that of the gaunt, free-ranging local cattle, and that a small group of dairy producers has increased milk production 1,000 percent in just 3 years. In some moods we may insist that people are more important than tigers. But in other moods these majestic animals seem the casualties of human inabilities to manage themselves and their resources intelligently, a tragic story that leaves us wondering whether the tigers should always lose and the people win.

When Nature Comes First

Ought we to save nature if this results in people going hungry? In people dying? Regrettably, sometimes, the answer is yes. In 20 years Africa's black rhinoceros population declined from 65,000 to 2,500, a loss of 97 percent; the species faces imminent extinction. Again, as

with the tigers, there has been loss of habitat caused by human population growth, an important and indirect cause; but the primary direct cause is poaching, this time for horns. People cannot eat horns; but they can buy food with the money from selling them. Zimbabwe has a hard-line shoot-to-kill policy for poachers, and over 150 poachers have been killed.¹⁶

So Zimbabweans do not always put people first; they are willing to kill some, and to let others to go hungry rather than sacrifice the rhino. If we always put people first, there will be no rhinos at all. Always too, we must guard against inhumanity, and take care, so far as we can, that poachers have other alternatives for overcoming their poverty. Still, if it comes to this, the Zimbabwean policy is right. Given the fact that rhinos have been so precipitously reduced, given that the Zimbabwean population is escalating (the average married woman there desires to have six children),¹⁷ one ought to put the black rhino as a species first, even if this costs human lives.

But the poachers are doing something illegal. What about ordinary people, who are not breaking any laws? The sensitive moralist may object that, even when the multiple causal factors are known, and lamented, when it comes to dealing with individual persons caught up in these social forces, we should factor out overpopulation, overconsumption, and maldistribution, none of which are the fault of the particular persons who may wish to develop their lands. "I did not ask to be born; I am poor, not overconsuming; I am not the cause but rather the victim of the inequitable distribution of wealth." Surely there still remains for such an innocent person a right to use whatever natural resources one has available, as best one can, under the exigencies of one's particular life, set though this is in these unfortunate circumstances. "I only want enough to eat, is that not my right?"

Human rights must include, if anything at all, the right to subsistence. So even if particular persons are located at the wrong point on the global growth graph, even if they are willy-nilly part of a cancerous and consumptive society, even if there is some better social solution than the wrong one that is in fact happening, have they not a right that will override the conservation of natural value? Will it not just be a further wrong to them to deprive them of their right to what little they have? Can basic human rights ever be overridden by a society that wants to do better by conserving natural value?

This requires some weighing of the endangered natural values. Consider the tropical forests. There is more richness there than in other regions of the planet—half of all known species. In South America, for example, there are one fifth of the planet's species of terrestrial mammals (800 species); there are one third of the planet's

flowering plants.¹⁸ The peak of global plant diversity is in the three Andean countries of Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru, where over 40,000 species occur on just 2 percent of the world's land surface.¹⁹ But population growth in South America has been as high as anywhere in the world,²⁰ and people are flowing into the forests, often crowded off other lands.

What about these hungry people? Consider first people who are not now there but might move there. This is not good agricultural soil, and such would-be settlers are likely to find only a short-term bargain, a long-term loss. Consider the people who already live there. If they are indigenous peoples, and wish to continue to live as they have already for hundreds and even thousands of years, there will be no threat to the forest. If they are cabaclos (of mixed European and native races), they can also continue the lifestyles known for hundreds of years, without serious destruction of the forests. Such peoples may continue the opportunities that they have long had. Nothing is taken away from them. They have been reasonably well fed, though often poor.

Can these peoples modernize? Can they multiply? Ought there to be a policy of feeding first all the children they bear, sacrificing nature as we must to accomplish this goal? Modern medicine and technology have enabled them to multiply, curing childhood diseases and providing better nutrition, even if these peoples often remain at thresholds of poverty. Do not such people have the right to develop? A first answer is that they do, but with the qualification that all rights are not absolute, some are weaker, some stronger, and the exercise of any right has to be balanced against values destroyed in the exercise of that right.

The qualification brings a second answer. If one concludes that the natural values at stake are quite high, and that the opportunities for development are low, because the envisioned development is inadvisable, then a possible answer is: No, there will be no development of these reserved areas, even if people there remain in the relative poverty of many centuries, or even if, with escalating populations, they become more poor. We are not always obligated to cover human mistakes with the sacrifice of natural values.

Again, one ought to be as humane as possible. Perhaps there can be development elsewhere, to which persons in the escalating population can be facilitated to move, if they wish. Indeed, this often happens, as such persons flee to the cities, though they often only encounter further poverty there, owing to the inequitable distribution of resources which we have lamented. If they remain in these areas of high biological diversity, they must stay under the traditional lifestyles of their present and past circumstances.

Does this violate human rights? Anywhere that there is legal zoning, persons are told what they may and may not do, in order to protect various social and natural values. Land ownership is limited ("imperfect," as lawyers term it) when the rights of use conflict with the rights of other persons. One's rights are constrained by the harm one does to others, and we legislate to enforce this (under what lawyers call "police power"). Environmental policy may and ought to regulate the harms that people do on the lands on which they live ("policing"), and it is perfectly appropriate to set aside conservation reserves to protect the cultural, ecological, scientific, economic, historical, aesthetic, religious, and other values people have at stake here, as well as for values that the fauna and flora have intrinsically in themselves. Indeed, unless there is such reserving of natural areas, counterbalancing the high pressures for development, there will be almost no conservation at all. Every person on Earth is told that he or she cannot develop some areas.

Persons are not told that they must starve, but they are told that they cannot save themselves from starving by sacrificing the nature set aside in reserves—not at least beyond the traditional kinds of uses that did leave the biodiversity on the landscape. If one is already residing in a location where development is constrained, this may seem unfair, and the invitation to move elsewhere a forced relocation. Relocation may be difficult proportionately to how vigorously the prevailing inequitable distribution of wealth is enforced elsewhere.

Human rights to development, even by those who are poor, though they are to be taken quite seriously, are not everywhere absolute, but have to be weighed against the other values at stake. An individual sees at a local scale; the farmer wants only to plant crops on the now forested land. But environmental ethics sees that the actions of individuals cumulate and produce larger scale changes that go on over the heads of these individuals. This ethic will regularly be constraining individuals in the interest of some larger ecological and social goods. That will regularly seem cruel, unfair to the individual caught in such constraints. This is the tragedy of the commons; individuals cannot see far enough ahead, under the pressures of the moment, to operate at intelligent ecological scales. Social policy must be set synoptically. This invokes both ecology and ethics, and blends them, if we are to respect life at all relevant scales.

These poor may not have so much a right to develop in any way they please, as a right to a more equitable distribution of the goods of the Earth that we, the wealthy, think we absolutely own.

Our traditional focus on individuals, and their rights, can blind us to how the mistakes (as well as the wisdom) of the parents can curse (and bless) the children, as the Ten Commandments put it, how

“the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation” (cf. Exodus 20.5). All this has a deeply tragic dimension, made worse by the coupling of human foibles with ecological realities. We have little reason to think that misguided compassion that puts food into every hungry mouth, be the consequences whatever they may, will relieve the tragedy. We also have no reason to think that the problem will be solved without wise compassion, balancing a love for persons and a love for nature.

Ought we to feed people first, and save nature last? We never face so simple a question. The practical question is more complex.

If persons widely demonstrate that they value many other worthwhile things over feeding the hungry (Christmas gifts, college educations, symphony concerts),
 and if developed countries, to protect what they value, post national boundaries across which the poor may not pass (immigration laws),
 and if there is unequal and unjust distribution of wealth, and if just redistribution to alleviate poverty is refused,
 and if charitable redistribution of justified unequal distribution of wealth is refused,
 and if one fifth of the world continues to consume four fifths of the production of goods and four fifths consumes one fifth,
 and if escalating birthrates continue so that there are no real gains in alleviating poverty, only larger numbers of poor in the next generation,
 and if low productivity on domesticated lands continues, and if the natural lands to be sacrificed are likely to be low in productivity,
 and if significant natural values are at stake, including extinctions of species,

then one ought not always to feed people first, but rather one ought sometimes to save nature.

Many of the “ands” in this conjunction can be replaced with “ors” and the statement will remain true, though we cannot say outside of particular contexts how many. The logic is not so much that of implication as of the weighing up of values and disvalues, natural and human, and of human rights and wrongs, past, present, and future.

Some will protest that this risks becoming misanthropic and morally callous. The Ten Commandments order us not to kill, and saving nature can never justify what amounts to killing people. Yes, but there is another kind of killing here, one not envisioned at Sinai, where humans are superkilling species. Extinction kills forms (*species*)—not just individuals; it kills collectively, not just distributively. Killing a natural kind is the death of birth, not just of an individual life. The historical lineage is stopped forever. Preceding the

Ten Commandments is the Noah myth, when nature was primordially put at peril as great as the actual threat today. There, God seems more concerned about species than about the humans who had then gone so far astray. In the covenant re-established with humans on the promised Earth, the beasts are specifically included. "Keep them alive with you...according to their kinds" (Genesis 6.19–20). There is something ungodly about an ethic by which the late-coming *Homo sapiens* arrogantly regards the welfare of one's own species as absolute, with the welfare of all the other five million species sacrificed to that. The commandment not to kill is as old as Cain and Abel, but the most archaic commandment of all is the divine, "Let the earth bring forth" (Genesis 1). Stopping that genesis is the most destructive event possible, and we humans have no right to do that. Saving nature is not always morally naive; it can deepen our understanding of the human place in the scheme of things entire, and of our duties on this majestic home planet.

NOTES

1. *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, Principle 1, UNCED document A/CONF.151/26, vol. I, ps. 15–25.
2. *Rio Declaration*, Principle 4.
3. *Rio Declaration*, Principle 5.
4. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (Arlington, Virginia), *Status Report*, vol. 29 (no. 10, September 10, 1994):3.
5. Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures*, 15th ed., Washington, DC: World Priorities, Inc., 1993.
6. Jonathan Power, 1992. "Despite Its Gifts, Brazil Is a Basket Case," *The Miami Herald*, June 22, p. 10A.
7. The empirical data below are in: Brian Huntley, Roy Siegfried, and Clem Sunter, *South African Environments into the 21st Century*, Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, Ltd, and Tafelberg Publishers Ltd., 1989; Rob Preston-Whyte and Graham House, eds., *Rotating the Cube: Environmental Strategies for the 1990s*, Durban: Department of Geographical and Environmental Sciences and Indicator Project South Africa, University of Natal, 1990; and Alan B. Durning, *Apartheid's Environmental Toll*, Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 1990.
8. Huntley, Siegfried, and Sunter, p. 85.
9. Mamphela Ramphele, ed., *Restoring the Land: Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, London: Panos Publications, 1991.
10. The pie chart summarizes data in the *World Development Report 1991*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

11. Peter M. Vitousek, Paul R. Ehrlich, Anne H. Ehrlich, and Pamela A. Matson, "Human Appropriation of the Products of Biosynthesis," *BioScience* 36(1986): 368–373.
12. Robert Goodland, "The Case That the World Has Reached Limits," ps. 3–22 in Robert Goodland, Herman E. Daly, and Salah El Serafy, eds., *Population, Technology, and Lifestyle*, Washington, DC: Island Press, 1992.
13. Daniel Hillel, *Out of the Earth*, New York: Free Press, Macmillan, 1991, p. 279.
14. E. O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 267; Alison Jolly, *A World Like Our Own: Man and Nature in Madagascar*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
15. Geoffrey C. Ward, "The People and the Tiger," *Audubon* 96 (no. 4, July–August 1994):62–69.
16. Joel Berger and Carol Cunningham, "Active Intervention and Conservation: Africa's Pachyderm Problem," *Science* 263(1994): 1241–1242.
17. John Bongaarts, "Population Policy Options in the Developing World," *Science* 263(1994):771–776.
18. Michael A. Mares, "Conservation in South America: Problems, Consequences, and Solutions," *Science* 233(1986):734–739.
19. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, p. 197.
20. Ansley J. Coale, "Recent Trends in Fertility in the Less Developed Countries," *Science* 221(1983):828–832.

Saving Nature and Feeding People

Alan Carter*

Holmes Rolston, III has argued that there are times when we should save nature rather than feed people. In arguing thus, Rolston appears tacitly to share a number of assumptions with Garrett Hardin regarding the causes of human overpopulation. Those assumptions are most likely erroneous. Rather than our facing the choice between saving nature or feeding people, we will not save nature unless we feed people.

I

Ever since the publication of the Brundtland Report,¹ an ever-growing number have pinned their hopes on “sustainable development” as a way of reconciling an environmental concern with the need for development in the poorer countries. On the other hand, many environmentalists are surely right to be suspicious of the apparent presupposition on the part of some advocates of sustainable development that levels of material well-being can go on developing forever on a finite planet. However, Holmes Rolston, III seems to go much further in famously challenging the view that human beings have a right to any development when it would destroy the habitats of endangered species.² Indeed, he goes so far as to argue that there are times when the preservation of species, such as the rhinoceros or the tiger, should take priority over the feeding of an expanding human population, for, in his view, it is far more important to save threatened species than the lives of individual human beings.

Rolston also appears to oppose liberal immigration policies when, writing of the United States, he observes that “already 30 percent of our population growth is by immigration, legal and illegal. Sooner or later we must fence them out, or face the loss of the prosperity we value,” adding that “it is hard not to conclude that [fencing them out] is sometimes right.”³ But in noting that “we let foreigners die, when we are not willing to open our five hundred wilderness areas, nearly 100 million acres, to Cubans and Ethiopians,”⁴ he also seems to indicate that immigrants should be excluded for environmental reasons. This

* Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado at Boulder, 169 Hellems, 232 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0232. Carter is the author of three books, his last being *A Radical Green Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 1999), and more than fifty articles.

¹ See Gro Harlem Brundtland et al., *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

² See Holmes Rolston, III, “Feeding People versus Saving Nature,” in William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette, eds., *World Hunger and Morality*, 2d ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1996).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

willingness to allow other humans to die might strike many as inhumane, but Rolston counters:

Feeding people always seems humane, but, when we face up to what is really going on, by just feeding people, without attention to the larger social results, we could be feeding a kind of cancer.

One can say that where there is a hungry mouth, one should do what it takes to get food into it. But when there are two mouths there the next day, and four the day after that, and sixteen the day after that, one needs a more complex answer.⁵

Thus, in a nutshell, Rolston asks: "Ought we to save nature if this results in people going hungry? In people dying?" His reply is: "Regrettably, sometimes, the answer is yes."⁶

II

Rolston's argument has provoked some highly critical responses, perhaps none more so than Andrew Brennan's. Brennan accuses Rolston and others of drawing "perhaps unconsciously, on a tradition of sporting elitism associated with the Great White Hunter"⁷—a tradition going back to wealthy, aristocratic Europeans in the nineteenth century seeking to limit the effects of poor Africans on game reserves so that they could slaughter "on average around 40,000 elephant each year."⁸ Brennan sees a clear connection between the tradition of the Great White Hunter and Aldo Leopold, who has exerted a strong influence on Rolston's thinking, as well as on numerous other environmental ethicists, especially in the United States and Australasia.

Moreover, it is clear that Brennan views widespread U.S. and Australasian conceptions of "environmental ethics" as far too restricted, for he bemoans

... the narrow scope adopted by the majority of writers. Most human lives are played out on three environmental stages—the city, the savannah and the shores of lake and sea. For the most part, these environments did not feature in the new turn. Instead it was the mountain, the forest and the wild river which attracted most attention. Indeed, the term "environmental ethics" was a misnomer. The majority of writers were concerned mainly with the diminishing number of wild places of the planet, and environmental ethics was conceived largely as a celebration of wilderness and the enumeration of reasons for its preservation.⁹

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁷ Andrew Brennan, "Poverty, Puritanism and Environmental Conflict," *Environmental Values* 7, no. 3 (1998): 305.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

Brennan is evidently appalled by anyone putting wilderness above human starvation when he or she hasn't even attempted to understand fully how institutions and corporate actors, such as banks and transnational corporations, play a key role in environmental problems. It is also clear that Brennan sees echoes in Rolston's work of those aspects of a certain environmentalist position that had earlier been so vociferously criticized by Murray Bookchin, for as Brennan writes concerning some of Rolston's remarks: "These are astonishing expressions of misanthropy, similar to those which a decade ago provoked consternation and division in North American eco-philosophy."¹⁰

So what is this division that Brennan is here referring to? It is none other than the acrimonious dispute between social ecologists and deep ecologists, which initially erupted when Bookchin addressed the National Gathering of U.S. Greens at Amherst, Massachusetts in June 1987. In his speech, Bookchin denounced deep ecology for having "parachuted into our midst . . . from the Sunbelt's bizarre mix of Hollywood and Disneyland, spiced with homilies from Taoism, Buddhism, spiritualism, reborn Christianity, and, in some cases, eco-Fascism. . . ."¹¹ Bookchin also objected to deep ecology primarily because of its failure to emphasize, or even to take seriously in some cases, the social causes of ecological crises; whereas what characterizes social ecology is precisely a concentration on the social structures that, Bookchin claims, give rise through the exercise of domination to the environmental threats we currently face. According to Bookchin, it is because deep ecology lacks an adequate social theory that some of its adherents have tended toward ecofascism: namely, toward an authoritarian approach that puts the collective before the individual, that is hostile to immigration, and that seems content simply to let people in other countries starve. In particular, Bookchin complains, certain deep ecologists have been known to espouse "the infamous 'lifeboat ethic' that denies the need to share the means of life with others who are less privileged."¹² In short, it is his intense hostility to the lifeboat ethic that principally explains Bookchin's earlier outspoken denunciation of deep ecology.

Given Brennan's reference to this dispute, what seems to be lying behind his critique of Rolston, then, is an equally strong reaction to what he, too, appears to regard as an insidious form of ecofascism. The environmental thinker who is clearly lurking in the background here, as in Bookchin's earlier denunciation of deep ecology, is Garrett Hardin.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹¹ Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus 'Deep Ecology': A Challenge for the Ecology Movement," *The Raven* 3 (1987): 221.

¹² Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1986), pp. 12–13.

III

There is no doubt that Hardin's arguments have been extremely influential in certain sections of the environmental preservation movement. His assumptions appear again and again in numerous environmentalists' writings. For example, in a now classic article within the field of environmental ethics, J. Baird Callicott opines that if there were an increase in the "available food resources for human beings" through humans converting to vegetarianism, then "the human population would probably, as past trends overwhelmingly suggest, expand in accordance with the potential thus afforded."¹³ Callicott here seems to be directly influenced by an earlier seminal work in the field—namely, John Rodman's lengthy review of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* and Christopher Stone's *Should Trees Have Standing?* for Rodman also expresses concern about "the possible effects of an enlarged food supply upon world population trends," and wonders whether "vegetarianism, like modern medicine and the Green Revolution, [would] end up promoting further overpopulation, more habitat encroachment on the remnants of wilderness and wildlife, and, in the long run, more human and nonhuman suffering in the world."¹⁴ These words could just as easily have been written by Hardin.

One of Hardin's principal claims is that there is something fundamentally wrong with any ethic that requires people in the affluent countries to share their wealth with those in poorer countries¹⁵; and what it is that is wrong with any such ethic "is that it leads to the tragedy of the commons."¹⁶ This mooted tragedy arises when everyone pursues his or her own self-interest.¹⁷ Imagine that ten herders each graze ten animals on a common pasture. If the "commons" is at its carrying capacity of one hundred cattle, then it will deteriorate slightly if one more animal is added. But if a herder does put an extra animal onto the common land, then he or she will get all the benefit from that extra animal, while only suffering one tenth of the cost. It is therefore individually rational for the herder to add an extra animal and reap the overall benefit. But as every herder reasons in this way, the result will be that the common land is overrun by extra cattle and will end up ruined. Hardin thinks that the tragedy of the commons applies analogously to environmental problems such as overfishing, the misuse of rangelands, and the emission of pollution.

¹³ J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 335.

¹⁴ John Rodman, "The Liberation of Nature?" *Inquiry* 20 (1977): 106–07.

¹⁵ For compelling arguments supporting a moral obligation to provide aid to the hungry, see Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229–43, and James Rachels, "Killing and Starving to Death," in Jan Narveson, ed., *Moral Issues* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁶ Garrett Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat," in Narveson, *Moral Issues*, p. 170.

¹⁷ See Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," in Herman E. Daly, ed., *Toward a Steady-State Economy* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973).

Furthermore, in Hardin's view, the tragedy of the commons also applies to population growth, where a couple gain all the benefits from having an extra child, but do not pay all the environmental costs that the extra child incurs, because the environmental costs are spread throughout the community. The gains are enjoyed privately while the costs are borne by the public. Consequently, it is in the parents' self-interest to have the additional child because the benefits they gain outweigh the costs they have to bear individually. Hence, in being rational, they choose to have another child. As every couple reasons this way, then there is uncontrolled population growth until the planet's carrying capacity is overshot and mass starvation follows. Every parent insists on his or her individual right to have an extra child, but refuses to accept responsibility for the costs thereby imposed on the public—in other words, the disbenefits that are foisted onto everyone. Moreover, uncontrolled population growth will have severe environmental effects. Thus, what Hardin concludes is that people in the developed world should allow many of those who go hungry in the poorer countries to starve to death. Moreover, he also concludes that the developed countries should enforce strict immigration policies to prevent them from being overrun by immigrants flooding in from poorer parts of the world.

IV

But if we are to appraise Hardin's conclusions in favor of a lifeboat ethic, we first need to consider his argument in some detail. He begins by claiming that idealistic people promote measures such as "generous" immigration policies "that are suicidal,"¹⁸ given the serious problems that confront our continued survival as a species. What is particularly problematic about this generous attitude of such "idealistic" people is that it "results in asserting inalienable rights while ignoring or denying matching responsibilities."¹⁹ What Hardin seems to have in mind here is asserting, say, that poor countries have the right to receive aid or that their members have the right to choose their family size without their simultaneously having to accept any responsibility for controlling population growth. Clearly, an expanding world population is going to make ever-greater demands on our planet. Thus, in Hardin's view, were countries to get away with claiming rights without accepting their responsibilities, then our species would certainly not be able to survive.

To convince us, Hardin offers a now famous analogy—namely, that of a lifeboat—which he spells out as follows:

Metaphorically, each rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other, much more crowded lifeboats.

¹⁸ Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat," p. 167.

Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for a while in the water outside, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat, or in some other way to benefit from the “goodies” on board. What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do? This is the central problem of “the ethics of a lifeboat.”²⁰

The reason why Hardin thinks that it is appropriate to make a comparison between rich countries and lifeboats is because they both have a limit to the number of people they can support, for “the land of every nation has a limited carrying capacity,”²¹ which more and more people are becoming convinced we “have already exceeded.”²²

To make matters clearer, Hardin proceeds to spell out his analogy in greater detail: on our lifeboat there are fifty people. It could carry another ten, making an absolute maximum of sixty. But if an extra ten were taken on board, then there would be no “safety factor.” For example, we might think that we have enough supplies on board for sixty, but some of those supplies might turn out to be inadequate. Hence, it is far safer to restrict the number of survivors to fifty and retain a safety margin to allow for such unforeseen difficulties. Now, swimming around the lifeboat are one hundred people who are demanding that they be pulled on board or who are asking for “handouts.”²³ What should our response be? Hardin lists three possibilities.

First, we might feel that we should “try to live by the Christian ideal of being ‘our brother’s keeper,’ or by the Marxian ideal . . . of ‘from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.’”²⁴ But given the Christian ideal, everyone is equally our sibling to be carried; and from the Marxist perspective, everyone equally needs to be pulled on board in order to survive. So, were we to act upon either ideal, then the lifeboat would be swamped by 100 people trying to clamber on board, and it would certainly sink. The result would be that everyone would drown. So the first possible response would mean, as Hardin remarks: “Complete justice, complete catastrophe.”²⁵

Second, we could admit an extra ten and lose the safety margin. But Hardin thinks that “we will sooner or later pay dearly”²⁶ if we do. However, in response, it should be noted that this result could not be taken for granted. It is at best only probable that losing the safety margin would be disastrous. Nevertheless, were we to respond by agreeing to take another ten on board, then a major moral problem would arise, for, as Hardin asks, “*which* 10 do we let in? ‘First come, first served?’ The best 10? The neediest 10? How do we *discriminate*? And

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 168.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 169.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

what do we say to the 90 who are excluded?"²⁷ However, in thinking that these questions pose a problem for the second option alone, Hardin seems merely to be taking the *status quo* for granted, for we can just as easily ask of the fifty who remain on board: "By what right do they hold their places?" First come, first served? The best fifty? The neediest fifty? What do we then say to the one hundred who are excluded? Hardin appears to be simply presupposing the right of those on board to keep their places. But then isn't this approach just asserting rights "while ignoring or denying matching responsibilities"—which is precisely what he accused idealistic people of doing? Hardin seems to be just asserting the right to hold onto what one has irrespective of any responsibility to anyone else's needs. Moreover, consider: what if there were just one person in the lifeboat? Should he or she allow no one else on board because of some doubt he or she might have as to which ones to save?

Nevertheless, given his analogy, Hardin is surely right that not everyone could be saved, and he prefers the third possible response: to refuse admission to anyone else, and thereby retain the safety margin. "Survival of the people in the lifeboat is then possible (though we shall have to be on our guard against boarding parties),"²⁸ as he remarks. What this response boils down to is that even if we could support more people in the rich countries than live in them at present, we should not admit any more or share any of our resources with the poor of other countries because to do so would be to lose our safety margin.

Now, some might feel that this third response would be unjust, and might feel guilty about being one of the privileged few who are able to survive. Hardin's reply to anyone who feels guilty is uncompromising:

Get out and yield your place to others. Such a selfless action might satisfy the conscience of those who are addicted to guilt but it would not change the ethics of the lifeboat. The needy person to whom the guilt-addict yields his place will not himself feel guilty about his sudden good luck. (If he did he would not climb aboard.) The net result of conscience-stricken people relinquishing their unjustly held positions is the elimination of their kind of conscience from the lifeboat. The lifeboat, as it were, purifies itself of guilt.²⁹

In other words, even if there were a moral standpoint from which the fifty retaining their places on the lifeboat could be regarded as unjust, that sort of ethic will, in any case, become extinct. It is "the ethics of the lifeboat" that are most appropriate if our species is to survive; and it is such ethics that will in fact survive because all other ethical positions will die out along with those who subscribe to them. What this view seems to imply is that not only is it better that the fifty ensure that they survive and ignore the pleas of the one hundred

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

who will thereby drown, but also that the ethics that will inevitably predominate will not regard this solution as unjust.

The conclusion to draw, Hardin therefore insists, is that idealistic people are seriously wrong in being generous to the poor of other countries by advocating an open immigration policy or by wishing to share their resources with them. To do so would be suicidal for our species as a whole, just as trying to pull all one hundred out of the sea would mean that none of those shipwrecked would survive. Furthermore, Hardin indicates that the situation is in fact worse than the lifeboat analogy suggests because, whereas the one hundred in the sea will not increase in number, we live on a planet with a greatly expanding human population. Even worse, the populations of different countries are expanding at different rates. As Hardin writes:

The harsh characteristics of lifeboat ethics are heightened by reproduction, particularly by reproductive differences. The people inside the lifeboats of the wealthy nations are doubling in numbers every 87 years; those outside are doubling every 35 years, on the average. And the relative difference in prosperity is becoming greater.³⁰

Worse still, there are countries doubling their populations in an even shorter time. The average doubling time of “the combined populations of Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Morocco, Thailand, Pakistan, and the Philippines” is only twenty-one years.³¹ In 1973 the combined population of just these seven poor countries was approximately equal to that of the United States (then at 210 million). What Hardin asks us to consider is what would happen if the United States were to share its resources with just these countries.

Initially, in the model given, the ratio of non-Americans to Americans would be one to one. But consider what the ratio would be 87 years later. By this time Americans would have doubled to a population of 420 million. The other group (doubling every 21 years) would now have swollen to 3,540 million. Each American would have more than eight people to share with. How could the lifeboat possibly keep afloat?³²

So, if we are already near or if, as some think, we have already exceeded the carrying capacity of the land, then even those in the rich countries would be unable to survive were they to try to help all those who are increasing in numbers in the poor countries, and the latter are going to starve in any case. Therefore, the rich countries should just be concerned about their own survival—their survival at least is possible, but only if they do not give their resources away or allow their “lifeboat” to be overrun.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³² *Ibid.*

Is there any alternative? If people act irresponsibly when pursuing their own self-interest, then, Hardin insists, some coercive system would be required to keep them in order. But we do not have any international coercive system. The United Nations, for example, is, in Hardin's view, "a toothless tiger."³³ So what should we do about world hunger? Hardin argues that on no account should we set up a world food bank to distribute food to the poor, for that would only encourage the governments of poor countries to act even more irresponsibly. Why should they save food from "out of the production of the good years in anticipation of bad years that are sure to come"?³⁴ There would be no need as "others will bail them out whenever they are in trouble."³⁵ Hence, an international food bank would not, in Hardin's view, be a real "bank" at all, "but a disguised one-way transfer device for moving wealth from rich countries to poor."³⁶ Hardin is convinced that any such transfer device would be disastrous. Without such a redistribution from the rich to the poor, the population of a country would rise until it overshoot its carrying capacity—something that would become apparent the moment certain emergencies arose (say, a crop failure). It would be unable to support everyone within its boundaries, and the population would fall back to that of its carrying capacity or perhaps even below it. When the emergency receded, the population would begin to rise again, only to fall back when the next emergency occurs.

Thus, when a country is left to its own devices, its population would fluctuate around its carrying capacity. Although Hardin acknowledges that such a demographic cycle "obviously involves great suffering in the restrictive phase," it is nevertheless, in his view, "normal to any independent country with inadequate population control."³⁷ If such suffering in an independent country is to be avoided, then "those in power [must] resist the temptation to convert extra food into extra babies."³⁸ Instead, of succumbing to any such temptation, they must limit their population so as to retain the necessary safety margin.

In short, the problem arises, according to Hardin, because there are "poor countries that are governed by rulers insufficiently wise and powerful."³⁹ If the insufficiently wise and powerful rulers of a poor country can rely on food aid from richer countries, then the population of their country will not fluctuate around its carrying capacity. Instead, there will be a "ratchet effect." When the population grows beyond the carrying capacity of the country and an emergency arises, then rather than the population falling back to or below the carrying capacity, aid will flood in and support the population at the increased

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 172–73.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

level. The population will then continue to expand until there is another emergency, which will trigger more food being transferred from the rich countries. So, the population will be ratcheted up higher and higher without ever falling back. Put another way, a poor country would find itself on a "population *escalator*,"⁴⁰ with emergencies becoming evermore severe. As Hardin graphically concludes, "The process is brought to an end only by the total collapse of the whole system, producing a catastrophe of scarcely imaginable proportions."⁴¹ Hence, a system which allowed poor countries to withdraw food from a food bank set up by the rich countries could only lead to disaster, for, as Hardin warns:

The license to make such withdrawals diminishes whatever motivation poor countries might otherwise have to control their populations. Under the guidance of this ratchet, wealth can be steadily-moved [*sic*] in one direction only, from the slowly breeding rich to the rapidly-breeding [*sic*] poor, the process finally coming to a halt only when all countries are equally and miserably poor.⁴²

Now, there are those who emphasize a "benign demographic transition"—the assumption being that once *per capita* GNP has reached a certain point, then the birth rate of the less developed countries will fall. According to Hardin, "Foreign aid has proceeded on this assumption for more than two decades. Unfortunately it has produced no indubitable instance of the asserted effect."⁴³ Hardin even goes so far as to oppose helping the poor to feed themselves:

Every human being born constitutes a draft on all aspects of the environment—food, air, water, unspoiled scenery, occasional and optional solitude, beaches, contact with wild animals, fishing, hunting—the list is long and incompletely known. Food can, perhaps, be significantly increased: but what about clean beaches, unspoiled forests, and solitude? If we satisfy the need for food in a growing population we necessarily decrease the supply of other goods, and thereby increase the difficulty of equitably allocating scarce goods. . . . *Every life saved this year in a poor country diminishes the quality of life for subsequent generations.*⁴⁴

Consequently, Hardin is convinced that our well-meaning attempts to help poor nations have only caused them long-term harm. He clearly believes that it would be far better to allow millions to starve to death now than to contribute to the ratchet effect that can only lead, in his view, to global disaster. Moreover,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

a greater number will suffer in the long run if we allow population to grow without restraint.

Not surprisingly, many people experience a knee-jerk reaction to Hardin's views. It is also unsurprising that many view him as the archetypical ecofascist. But it needs emphasizing that his argument is unmistakably a moral one, for he is basically asking of us: isn't it better to allow millions to starve to death now than to be the cause of billions dying later?

V

Are there any cogent criticisms that might be leveled against Hardin's argument? Well, he argues as if the affluent have been too well-intentioned toward the world's poor. One reply is to point out that the rich countries have not, in fact, been all that well-intentioned. For example, Susan George argues that U.S. food aid, rather than simply being humanitarian, is actually "a means for developing markets, for helping agribusiness, for gaining a stranglehold on the policy decisions of needy governments and for promoting US foreign policy and military goals,"⁴⁵ adding that "charity indeed begins at home. Any ten-per-cent [*sic*] increase of per capita income in a country receiving food aid is estimated to result in 21 per cent [*sic*] more sales of US [*sic*] farm products."⁴⁶ Indeed, the actual intentions of the world's richest country seem quite explicit in the case of Public Law 480. As George writes:

Public Law 480 (now also called the Food for Peace Law) [was] passed by the US Congress in 1954 with these stated purposes: "*An Act to increase the consumption of United States' agricultural commodities in foreign countries, to improve the foreign relations of the United States and for other purposes.*" The Congress further specifically declared that one goal was "to develop and expand export markets" for American products.⁴⁷

To see how good an investment the Food for Peace Program turned out to be for the United States, consider the case of Japan. George points out that "from the beginning of the Program in 1954 Japan got not quite \$400 million worth of food aid, but by 1975, had *bought* over \$20 billion worth of food. Its purchases of food imports alone are now worth over \$2 billion a year to the US."⁴⁸ In a word, the motives behind Public Law 480 could be viewed as on a par with those of a drug pusher: to change the diet in other countries in order

⁴⁵ Susan George, *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 212.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

to get the rest of the world hooked on supplies of U.S. grain. Even Hardin acknowledges that Public Law 480 merely served "special interest groups"⁴⁹ within the United States.

In fact, one could go considerably further and argue that the history of economic relations between the developed and the poorer countries is one of international exploitation which has led to the underdevelopment of the poorer regions.⁵⁰ In a word, it can be argued that the rich countries are responsible for much of the poverty within other countries. In which case, Hardin could hardly be justified in objecting to the rich genuinely helping the poor to feed themselves on the grounds that to do so might reduce the availability of the scarce goods (such as solitude) that we in the rich countries currently enjoy. Our enjoyment of those scarce goods would have been obtained at the expense of those living in poor countries. If we have underdeveloped poor countries, it is more like our having sunk their lifeboats. What would then give us the right to remain in comfort within ours while they all drown? As Michael Slote remarks:

... surely the activities of American corporations at home and abroad are part of the American way of life; and many people think that American business has always been involved in commissive wrongdoings: stripping poorer nations of their resources, polluting their environments, employing their inhabitants at slave wages, selling back finished goods to them at exorbitant prices, and, in the process of such economic colonialism, destroying their self-respect in something like the way a master can help destroy the self-respect of a servant.⁵¹

In other words, it is not that the United States has merely failed to provide sufficient aid to the poor nations, its corporations have actually acted wrongly, in Slote's view. As he continues:

... if our national standard of living has in significant part been created by the depredations of American businessmen, we may have no right to retain the rich fruits of our business enterprise, especially if many people who need our help are among those most wrongly dealt with by American business. Even our affluence in food is in great part due to our industrial capacity and so derives in part from wrongdoings in and to other nations; so don't we have an obligation to give food produced here to those who are impoverished, hungry or suffering from malnutrition in those other nations? I think, moreover, that this would probably be true even if it were only our ancestors who had committed wrongs in business dealings. One has a duty not to profit from the crimes of others (at the expense of those who

⁴⁹ Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat," p. 172.

⁵⁰ See, for example, André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

⁵¹ Michael Slote, "The Morality of Wealth," in Aiken and LaFollette, *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, p. 144.

have been harmed) and one has a duty not to receive stolen goods, and to varying degrees much of our national affluence may be seen as directly or indirectly involved in such questionable dealings.⁵²

Furthermore, as Thomas Nagel writes: "If those who are well off had *stolen* their riches from those who are poor, then redistribution would be nothing more than the uncontroversial rectification of past wrongs."⁵³

Nagel, however, does not wish to rest his case on the assumption that the affluent have stolen from the poor. Hardin, it will be recalled, seems to take it for granted that those lucky enough to be in a well-provisioned lifeboat have a right to their place on board. For this claim to cast light on the relationship between those in rich countries and those in poor ones, then Hardin must be presupposing that the rich have a right to keep their property. However, as Nagel points out, "any system of property, national or international, is an institution with moral characteristics: claims of right or entitlement made under it, claims as to what is ours to use as we wish, carry only as much moral weight as the legitimacy of the institution will bear."⁵⁴ Nagel argues that if a particular institution of property leads to unacceptable outcomes, then it would lack moral legitimacy and ought to be revised so as "to remove its objectionable features."⁵⁵ It is for this reason that redistribution in some form or other "is generally accepted as a built-in feature of the operation of modern national economies."⁵⁶ But why should this consideration be confined within a single nation? Why should it be perfectly acceptable for everyone else to starve to death when radical inequality within the United States is unacceptable, given that we are all part of the same world economy?

Now, Hardin might reply that we can solve radical inequality within the rich countries, but not globally, and to try to do so would result in a future global catastrophe. But as Nagel argues:

. . . transfers are the only way of preventing starvation and malnutrition for millions of people over the next 10 years. Those people have already been born, and a very powerful reason would be needed to deny them food resources that are definitely available. The reason offered by Hardin is not powerful enough, for it depends on a conjecture about what will happen in the future. We are therefore weighing the certainty of a present disaster against the possibility of a greater future disaster—a possibility to which no definite likelihood can be assigned.⁵⁷

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵³ Thomas Nagel, "Poverty and Food: Why Charity is Not Enough," in Peter G. Brown and Henry Shue, eds., *Food Policy: The Responsibility of the United States in the Life and Death Choices* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 55.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

The future disaster might not arise because we might, for example, discover some new method of greatly increasing global food production. In which case, it would be morally unacceptable in the extreme to allow millions to starve today in order to avert a future disaster that might never arise.

But environmentalists should be very wary of all such responses to Hardin, for one could equally argue that there is only a possibility that nuclear waste will harm future people, while it is a certainty that we will benefit from the electricity produced by nuclear power stations. Equally, global warming is only a risk, while driving cars seems to many to be a certain present benefit. In short, the kind of argument Nagel uses against Hardin may have extremely problematic environmental implications.

A different response might be to argue that it is highly doubtful that we in the rich countries would be dragged down into total poverty if we tried to help those who are starving in poorer countries. Consider:

In 1960, the 20% of the world's people who live in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20%; by 1995 it was 82 times. The world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over \$1 million million. Only four per cent of this wealth—\$40 billion—would be enough for basic education and healthcare, adequate food and safe water and sanitation for all the world's people.⁵⁸

Moreover, of these exceedingly opulent people, “the 15 richest have assets that exceed the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of sub-Saharan Africa,” while “the assets of the 84 richest exceed the GDP of China, which has 1.2 billion inhabitants.”⁵⁹ Indeed, according to United Nations' figures, “the three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined Gross Domestic Product of the 48 least-developed countries.”⁶⁰

So, it appears as if the rich could give people in the poor countries a considerable amount before being dragged down into severe poverty. It could be further argued that it is even more doubtful that we would be unable to survive if we were to distribute food to them—and remember that the lifeboat analogy suggests that if we try to help the drowning then we will all drown together. But as Peter Singer remarks:

It is just this assumption . . . that is doubtful. Consider the degree of our affluence—the material goods that we own and the wastage of food involved in the absurdly high meat content of our diet—and then ask yourself whether a substantial increase in overseas aid would threaten our survival. Without going into the

⁵⁸ Nikki Van Der Gaag, “Poor and Rich—The Facts,” *New Internationalist* 310 (1999): 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Nikki Van Der Gaag, “Poverty: Challenging the Myths,” *New Internationalist* 310 (1999): 9.

question of how much more food the world can produce. . . . we should note that the world presently produces enough food to give all its inhabitants an adequate diet. Unfortunately, that food is very unevenly distributed. *In the United States and Western Europe alone, more food is wasted by being fed to farm animals than the total world food shortfall.* Through his high meat diet, which provides him with about twice as much meat as his body can use, the average American indirectly consumes enough grain to feed four Indians. Under these circumstances the lifeboat analogy seems grotesquely inapt. It is rather as if we in the rich nations were on a luxurious yacht, feeding gluttonously and playing deck quoits to ward off obesity, while we avert our gaze from those drowning in the sea around us.⁶¹

Unfortunately, while this characterization might be true now, it doesn't answer Hardin's worry about an expanding human population, for it might still be the case that, in the long run, if we save people now, far more will suffer later. Equally, if we have, in effect, stolen what rightfully belonged to the poor in other countries, more might die in the long run if we were simply to return it.

Moreover, we might well be far too cavalier with respect to the question of how much food can be produced in the future. Consider the so-called "Green Revolution," which was touted as a technological advance capable of solving the world's food problems. It introduced fertilizer-consumptive, pesticide-consumptive, and irrigated water-consumptive hybrids that frequently increased inequality and, in consequence, poverty. The reason for the increase in inequality that only the richer farmers have been able to afford the whole package of seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, and irrigation, thereby increasing their yield. As Susan George writes, "When nothing is done to alleviate inequalities, the Green Revolution is guaranteed to worsen them."⁶² Thus, "the 'Green Revolution' has been a flagrant example of a 'developmental solution' that has brought nothing but misery to the poor."⁶³ Moreover, many environmentalists argue that increased inorganic fertilizer and pesticide use can have disastrous environmental consequences, and poorly thought out irrigation schemes can lead to salinization of the soil.

VI

Let us, therefore, consider a very different type of response to Hardin. Alan Gewirth, while arguing for a duty to aid those who are starving, has observed that one important consideration is that not everyone in poor countries is starving. Hence, there is a problem of how to get aid to those who are, rather than allowing the aid to be creamed off by the rich. Whether the poor get aid

⁶¹ Peter Singer, "Reconsidering the Famine Relief Argument," in Brown and Shue, *Food Policy*, pp. 47-48.

⁶² George, *How the Other Half Dies*, p. 132.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

or not is determined not just by the amount of food available in their country, "but also by the distribution of wealth and other forms of power."⁶⁴ Consequently, if we have a moral duty, it is not just to send food, but also to ensure "that the food is effectively distributed to those poor persons who need it,"⁶⁵ for "maldistribution causes a large segment of the problem of famine and malnutrition."⁶⁶

But most importantly, maldistribution of income and wealth is also thought by many to be a major cause of population growth, for as Gewirth observes, the unrestrained exercise of "procreative freedom" in poor countries

... is often a response to conditions of extreme poverty, in that the having of many children is viewed as necessary to assure basic well-being and future economic security. It seems, then, that if there is to be any possibility of checking excessive population growth in [poor countries] by voluntary means, these economic causes must be ameliorated. Ways must be found so that couples' having more than two children is not, and is not viewed by them as, a necessary condition for their avoiding poverty and economic insecurity.⁶⁷

Now, we could go beyond Gewirth by noting that following Hardin's recommendation that we resist aiding those who are starving in poor countries would actually make matters worse, for if it is poverty and economic insecurity that causes population growth, then to withhold aid would be to further encourage, not discourage, population growth among the poor. In other words, following Hardin's recommendations would mean that the poor would increase in numbers, and that there would be far less undisturbed habitat as a result, and, in general, a far greater environmental impact overall.

But are there any cogent grounds for holding this diametrically opposed view to Hardin's? If he were correct in thinking that providing aid to people in poor countries will simply exacerbate their long-term population problems because more available food will simply be converted into more babies, then there should be a straightforward correlation between the available food supply and population growth. To be precise, the more food available, the greater should be the population growth; and the less food available, the greater should be the decline in population. But Africa shows a reverse correlation. Regarding population, whereas an affluent country such as the U.K. presently has a growth rate of 1.8 percent, "many countries in Africa currently have growth rates between 3 and 4 percent, with an average for sub-Saharan Africa of 3.1 percent."⁶⁸ Yet,

⁶⁴ Alan Gewirth, "Starvation and Human Rights," in Kenneth E. Goodpaster and Kenneth M. Sayre, eds., *Ethics and Problems of the Twenty-first Century* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 152.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Amartya Sen, "Population: Delusion and Reality," *The New York Review of Books*, 22 September 1994, p. 65.

“between the three-year averages of 1979–1981 and 1991–1993 . . . food production per capita went down by 6 percent in Africa, and even the absolute size of food output fell in some countries. . . .”⁶⁹ Regarding economic growth, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing negative growth rates.⁷⁰ Hence, they are the countries least able to purchase the food they are failing to grow. In short, contrary to what one would expect were Hardin correct, “the regions of the Third World that lag most in achieving economic and social development, such as many countries in Africa, are, in general, also the ones that have failed to reduce birth rates significantly.”⁷¹

Thus, in sharp contradistinction to Hardin, the Nobel-Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen (upon whose work I draw heavily in what follows) points out that birth rates fall when people “have some basic education, know about family planning methods and have access to them, do not readily accept a life of persistent drudgery, and are not deeply anxious about their economic security.”⁷² Birth rates also fall when people

. . . are not forced by high infant and child mortality rates to be so worried that no child will survive to support them in their old age that they try to have many children.⁷³

In country after country the birth rate has come down with more female education, the reduction of mortality rates, the expansion of economic means and security, and greater public discussion of ways of living.⁷⁴

Hence, contrary to what one would conclude were Hardin correct in his core assumption that extra food is automatically converted into more babies, “conditions of economic security and affluence, wider availability of contraceptive methods, expansion of education (particularly female education), and lower mortality rates have had—and are currently having—quite substantial effects in reducing birth rates in different parts of the world.”⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65. “. . . the main culprit causing this state of affairs is the terrible failure of economic production in sub-Saharan Africa (connected particularly with political disruption, including wars and military rule).” Yet it was the superpowers, in playing their power politics in Africa, who provided much of the military armaments and who ultimately created the political disruption. This appears to be the “aid” that the affluent have most often provided for the poor.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷³ “High birth rates reflect people’s defensive reaction against enforced poverty. For those living at the margin of survival, children provide labor to augment meager family income. . . . And impoverished parents know that without children to care for them in old age, they will have nothing.” Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rossett, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, 2d ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 30.

⁷⁴ Sen, “Population: Delusion and Reality,” p. 68.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

These developments suggest a strategy that is the exact opposite of Hardin's, for as Sen argues: "With greater opportunities for education (especially female education), reduction of mortality rates (especially of children), improvement in economic security (especially in old age), and greater participation of women in employment and in political action, fast reductions in birth rates can be expected to result through the decisions and actions of those whose lives depend upon them."⁷⁶ Yet, many of these preconditions for a reduction in population growth require funding. But where are exceedingly poor people in poor countries to get that funding from? It would seem that if they are to reduce their numbers, or at least if they are to stop their populations from growing further, then they require aid from us. In other words, rather than our refusal to share with the poor providing a solution to world population growth, as Hardin claims, it may well be the fundamental problem.

Moreover, the above-mentioned preconditions for reducing birth rates make it clear why the population of Africa is continually expanding, for "sub-Saharan Africa lags behind other developing regions in economic security, in health care, in life expectancy, in basic education, and in political and economic stability."⁷⁷ Now contrast sub-Saharan Africa with the southern Indian state of Kerala, which has a population of 29 million people—a state "larger than most countries in the world (including Canada)."⁷⁸ Many who are concerned with population growth cite China's coercive one child-per-family policy. But between 1979 and 1991, the fertility rates in China fell from 2.8 to 2.0, while in Kerala they fell from 3.00 to 1.8.⁷⁹ "Kerala's birth rate of 18 per 1,000 is actually lower than China's 19 per 1,000."⁸⁰ Just how dramatic has been Kerala's success is indicated by its birth rate having "fallen from 44 per 1,000 in the 1950s to 18 by 1991."⁸¹

So why is Kerala so special? It would seem to be because it enjoys "a high female literacy rate (86%, which is substantially higher than China's 68%)⁸²; because while "[m]ale and female life expectancies at birth in China are respectively 67 and 71 years," for men and women in Kerala they are seventy-one and seventy-four years, respectively⁸³; and because "Kerala's low fertility rate has been achieved along with an infant mortality rate of 16.5 per 1,000 live births (17 for boys and 16 for girls), compared with China's 31 (28 for boys and 33 for girls)."⁸⁴ Moreover, Kerala stands in stark contrast with many other parts of India, for "other states in India in the so-called 'northern heartland' (such as

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan), have very low levels of education, especially female education, and of general health care (often combined with pressure on the poor to accept birth control measures, including sterilization, as a qualifying condition for medical attention and other public services). These states all have high fertility rates—between 4.4 and 5.1.”⁸⁵ Yet, “Kerala’s fertility rate of 1.8 not only compares well with China’s 2.0, but also with the US’s and Sweden’s 2.1, Canada’s 1.9, and Britain’s and France’s 1.8.”⁸⁶ Most interestingly, “Kerala, India’s star performer in expanding education and reducing both death rates and birth rates, is among the poorer Indian states.”⁸⁷ What is especially ironic is that Hardin concludes his article “Living on a Lifeboat” by taking India as his prime example.⁸⁸

But doesn’t Kerala being a poorer state support Hardin’s case? No, because while the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of Kerala is low, the absolute level of poverty is not, for it is one of the more egalitarian societies in the Third World. To make this point clearer, let us consider GNP (Gross National Product) for a moment. It will be recalled that Hardin dismisses the claim that there will be a “benign demographic transition” in poor countries. The claim made by those who hope for such a transition is that once their *per capita* GNP has reached a certain point, then the birth rate of the less developed countries will fall. But, as we noted, according to Hardin, “Foreign aid has proceeded on this assumption for more than two decades. Unfortunately it has produced no indubitable instance of the asserted effect.”⁸⁹

Now, even if Hardin is correct in thinking that there is no direct correlation between rising GNP and declining fertility rates, this does not entail that there are no grounds for ever expecting a benign demographic transition. Indeed, there are reasons for thinking that a benign demographic transition will not occur simply because of a rising GNP, for there is no direct correlation between a rising GNP and the elimination of severe poverty. As Robert Goodland and George Ledec write, “Some countries (such as China and Sri Lanka) have managed to meet the basic needs of the great majority of their populations at very low levels of per-capita GNP. Other countries (such as Brazil or Algeria) have attained much higher GNP levels and rapid growth rates, while comparatively failing to meet the basic needs of many of their citizens.”⁹⁰ How is it that GNP can rise and yet basic needs not be met? Because GNP is a very blunt instrument. It tells us about the level of economic activity within a country. It tells us nothing about the distribution of income and wealth within that country.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Hardin, “Living on a Lifeboat,” p. 177.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁹⁰ Robert Goodland and George Ledec, “Neoclassical Economics and Principles of Sustainable Development,” in Louis P. Pojman, ed., *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, 3d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2001), p. 483.

In other words, GNP can rise while the poor get even poorer, just so long as the increase enjoyed by the rich is greater than the decrease suffered by the poor. Hence, if poverty is a major cause of population growth, then there would be no reason to expect a benign demographic transition simply because GNP had risen. What would be a precondition for a benign demographic transition would be the eradication of severe poverty, especially that of women,⁹¹ and that is not the same as a rising GNP.⁹² Hardin rejects the assumption of a benign demographic transition because all he focuses upon is GNP, and not upon distribution of income and wealth or upon severe poverty. Hence, while he might be right to argue that rising GNPs do not give indisputable evidence for a benign demographic transition, he has provided no argument against the alternative view that the eradication of severe poverty can produce a benign demographic transition.

VII

It is worth noting that a different response to Hardin has come from William Aiken, who challenges the assumption that a country's carrying capacity is as fixed as Hardin seems to assume.⁹³ First of all, Hardin offers a kind of ecological critique of international aid. But national boundaries are arbitrary from an ecological point of view. Second, a country can support more people by improving its technology. It can also do so by means of trade. (Of course, those rich countries that exploit poorer countries can support far more people than they would be able to otherwise. In a word, economic power can increase a territory's ability to support its population.) On the other hand, poorer countries often feed fewer members of their own population than they could because, as a result of neocolonial economic structures, they grow nonfood crops for export. Hence, Aiken argues, human carrying capacity is not a biological limit, but an economic one.

Hence, it can also be argued against Hardin that a land's carrying capacity

⁹¹ However, doing so requires "poverty" to be suitably construed. See Vandana Shiva, "Development, Ecology, and Women," in John S. Dryzek and David Schlosberg, eds., *Debating the Earth: The Environmental Politics Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁹² "The lowering of the population growth rate in certain countries is apparently *not* related to the growth rate of the Gross National Product (GNP) or even to the *level* of per capita income but to a trend toward *equal distribution* of income and services such as health care. Where birth rates are declining—such as in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Egypt, Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Cuba, we find that governments have, or once had, some national policies favoring the low-income groups; whereas in Brazil, Venezuela, the Philippines, and Mexico the well-being of low-income groups is diminishing and birth rates are not declining significantly. The causal factors do not appear to be direct birth control programs but a shift in resources toward the poorest groups." Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, *Food First* (London: Abacus, 1982), p. 35.

⁹³ See William Aiken, "The 'Carrying Capacity' Equivocation," in Aiken and LaFollette, *World Hunger and Morality*.

is not fixed, as his argument seems to presuppose. But interestingly, his presupposition is wrong not just, as Aiken argues, because carrying capacity can be raised, but rather, and more importantly, because it can also decline. Indeed, Hardin himself notes elsewhere that “we know from experience that the environment can be irreversibly damaged and the carrying capacity of a land permanently lowered.”⁹⁴ Yet poor people are often forced to degrade the land and thereby reduce its carrying capacity. As the World Commission on Environment and Development notes, “Poverty is a major cause and effect of environmental problems. It is therefore futile to attempt to deal with environmental problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and international inequality.”⁹⁵ In a word, as Michael Redclift observes, “Human poverty makes physical environments poorer, just as poor physical environments make for greater human poverty.”⁹⁶

Thus, we might conclude that the longer poverty is allowed to persist, the more will the land be degraded, and the fewer will the land be able to support. In short, Hardin seems to think that environmental preservation requires us to allow the poor to starve. But such a policy could easily lead to the poor causing even greater environmental destruction as they desperately attempt to survive—for example, by poaching rhinos, chopping down the rain forest, and turning semiarid land into desert. Hence, there is further reason for thinking that Hardin’s apparent solution may well, in fact, be a large part of the greater problem.

Does all the above therefore justify those who see in the notion of “sustainable development” a license for the pursuit of permanently ongoing material development? Not at all. Those who are driven to degrade their land by burning cattle dung—their only fertilizer—on open fires might be able to live sustainable life styles if environmentally benign sources of renewable energy were made available to them. Doing so requires some degree of development. But it does not require that material development be neverending. Rather, it requires, what we might call, and what would be far less vague than the term *sustainable development*, “development for sustainability.” But such development will surely require material assistance from those who are currently far more affluent.

VIII

Finally, having considered some possible responses to Hardin, let us briefly return to Holmes Rolston, III. Rolston, it will be recalled, asks whether there

⁹⁴ Garrett Hardin, “Who Cares for Posterity?” in E. Partridge, ed., *Responsibilities to Future Generations: Environmental Ethics* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1981), p. 231.

⁹⁵ Brundtland et al., *Our Common Future*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Michael Redclift, *Development and the Environmental Crisis: Red or Green Alternatives?* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 79.

are times when we should save nature rather than feed people; and his answer is "yes." But whether or not the preservation of rare species does count for more than individual humans facing starvation, perhaps we could at least conclude, on the basis of the responses to Hardin outlined in the previous two sections of this article, that rare species will inevitably be driven to extinction if we do not simultaneously care about human starvation in other countries. This conclusion implies that it would be a major mistake to be panicked into trying to save a species of charismatic megafauna by means of an approach—namely, the withholding of aid—that is likely to result in increased human population pressure on natural habitats, with the further result of even greater loss of biodiversity. Of course, it might turn out to be the case that poverty and inequality are not, in fact, causes of population growth. But whereas it is problematic for an environmentalist to follow Nagel in choosing a certain present benefit at the cost of a possibly greater environmental harm, it is clearly morally unproblematic to choose a certain present benefit when there is a serious probability that choosing that benefit will prevent the greater environmental harm.

In conclusion, then, the question has been posed whether we should feed people or save nature? It should now be clear that there is reason to think that the question presents us with a false dichotomy, for it can be replied that we will not be able to save nature *unless* we feed people, especially those who are being driven by their poverty and economic insecurity to engage in environmentally destructive acts.

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE
AND ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITYALAN CARTER
Heythrop College

A great deal of today's political philosophy is preoccupied with theories of distributive justice.¹ However, there is also a growing interest among moral and political philosophers in environmental concerns. It is not surprising, therefore, that someone should undertake a study with the aim of ascertaining which conceptions of environmental sustainability are compatible with which theories of distributive justice – the principal task undertaken by Andrew Dobson in his recent book *Justice and the Environment*.² But Dobson is motivated by a second, seemingly related, matter. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, there emerged not only a highly visible environmental movement but also an environmental justice movement. To assess how compatible, at least in principle, their respective claims and concerns are, it might prove advantageous to carry out the first task – namely, to see which theories of environmental sustainability are compatible with which theories of distributive justice.

Dobson argues that the environmental justice movement³ sees the environment as 'a particular form of goods and bads that society must divide among its members' (p. 20). Its concern is that the poor suffer a disproportionate amount of the bads while the rich enjoy a disproportionate amount of the goods. But with this particular focus, environmentalists are likely to see the environmental justice movement as lacking their wider environmental concerns, while certain of those within the environmental justice movement have criticized environmentalists for being too preoccupied with, for example, the preservation of wilderness. Can these two movements be brought closer together? Perhaps they could if they shared an appropriate conception of environmental sustainability and an appropriate theory of social justice.

Dobson commences by seeking to identify the various conceptions of environmental sustainability; and on the basis of his perusal of the literature, then distils them into specific types. Now, it might be objected that this approach will generate results that will very quickly become

450 ALAN CARTER

outdated, for new and improved conceptions might emerge. But Dobson disagrees:

there would be no point in developing a typology for a concept which had had little discursive development: there would be no guarantee that the point had been reached beyond which no further dimension of the concept would be revealed. I think we can safely ignore this caveat in the case of environmental sustainability and sustainable development, however, since both terms have been in use for ten years or more, and since enormous amounts have been written and spoken about them both in that period. We should be safe to assume, therefore, that a diligent survey of the material hitherto produced will reveal all the possible dimensions available (pp. 34–5).

Given that it took two and a half thousand years for a Dahl and a Schumpeter to develop their respective ‘empirical theories’ of ‘democracy’,⁴ both providing in the process very different conceptions of the widely-used term ‘democracy’ to those employed by previous theorists, then Dobson’s confidence in his providing an exhaustive typology seems a little misplaced.

Nevertheless, Dobson confidently proceeds to subsume all conceptions of environmental sustainability under three types. The first he labels the ‘critical natural capital’ conception of ‘sustainability’, which is principally concerned with ‘the sustaining of natural capital that is preconditional for human life’ (p. 44). Hence this conception emphasizes the fact ‘that ecological processes underpin the rest of human activity, and if they are impaired, a condition for the very possibility of human activity is impaired too’ (p. 44). Thus the ‘critical natural capital’ conception focuses on the sustainability of, for example, ‘ecological processes’ at the global level but also on topsoil and water at the local level.

The second conception – what Dobson labels the ‘irreversibility’ conception – goes beyond the first in having some ‘concern for aspects of the natural environment for their own sake’ (p. 47). In brief, on this conception ‘what should be sustained are aspects and features of non-human nature whose loss would be irreversible’ (ibid.).

The third conception goes beyond both the first and second conceptions of ‘sustainability’, for it ascribes intrinsic value to nature and is thus concerned with ‘the sustaining of “natural value”’ (p. 61). In so doing, this conception – what Dobson labels ‘the natural value conception’ – recognizes ‘obligations to nature’ (p. 52).

So far, I have only mentioned ‘environmental sustainability’. What about ‘sustainable development’? Dobson argues that there are two theories of sustainable development and that their views of environmental sustainability both fall within the ‘critical natural capital’ conception. Moreover, Dobson concludes that ‘the principal motivation behind any conception or theory of sustainable development is human interest in human welfare. Sustainable development is, therefore, an anthropocentric

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY 451

notion in a way that environmental sustainability need not (but may) be' (p. 61).

But is this necessarily so? The term 'development' could mean several things. Just to take two possibilities: it could mean an ongoing process; or it could mean a final stage. And within mainstream 'development theory', some have argued that a precondition for 'political modernization' is a society attaining a certain level of economic development. Consequently, this reaching of such an economic stage is what certain modernization theorists have advocated for political reasons.⁵ Hence, analogously, there is no reason to confine 'sustainable development' to processes of change that proceed forever. The term 'sustainable development' could be used to refer, instead, to the attainment of a certain level that is viewed as a precondition for sustainable lifestyles: 'development for sustainability',⁶ in other words.

So, for example, some poor people need to burn far more wood than they would need to if they possessed wood-burning stoves. Hence, if one wants to stop them denuding the ground of tree cover and hastening the process of desertification, then one needs to aid their society in attaining a certain level of development. One might feel that one needs to go even further and provide not wood-burning stoves but biogas generators, say. And one might want to do so simply because one wishes to stop those living in that undeveloped or underdeveloped society from destroying their natural environment. And the motivation for that could be purely biocentric. Thus Dobson's assumption that 'sustainable development is ... an anthropocentric notion in a way that environmental sustainability need not ... be', is a symptom of his presumption that all relevant conceptions of environmental sustainability and sustainable development must have been 'developed' within the literature he has perused.

Nevertheless, having claimed to have identified the three conceptions of 'sustainability', Dobson then attempts to map out 'the dimensions of social justice'. He claims that the various theories of social justice found in 'the material' he has perused identify specific dispensers of justice who distribute specific things to specific recipients according to a specific principle. Theories differ in so far as they identify different dispensers, different recipients, different things to be distributed and a different principle. Dobson also views each theory as combining either impartiality or substantiveness with either proceduralism or consequentialism and with either universalism or particularism. This combination Dobson very unhelpfully labels 'the basic structure'.⁷ What he then proceeds to do is to ascertain where each of the three conceptions of 'sustainability' he has identified has the 'most interesting' 'encounter' with the various points on his map of 'the dimensions of social justice'.

So, Dobson begins with the 'critical natural capital' conception of 'sustainability' and argues, amongst other things, that communitarian

452 ALAN CARTER

theories of justice are incompatible with it (see p. 95). But Dobson's arguments are at best confusing, if not confused. For example he writes: 'Walzer's rejection of both of the constitutive terms of "international justice" make him an unlikely source of succour for those for whom international justice is functional for environmental sustainability – i.e., practically everyone in the sustainable development movement' (p. 95). Now, it doesn't take a great deal of insight to observe that a 'particularist' theory of social justice is unlikely to be the preferred choice of those concerned with 'international distributive justice' (p. 94). But it is far from clear that the latter is a necessary feature or accompaniment of any 'critical natural capital' conception of 'sustainability'. Indeed, Dobson later argues that 'the connection between environmental sustainability and distributive justice is fundamentally a contingent one' (p. 133). And yet he posits that 'the conception of environmental sustainability with which we are currently engaged seems incompatible – in this context at least – with particularist theories of justice' (p. 95). But there seems to be no reason for concluding that 'international distributive justice' isn't merely 'contingently connected', if that, to the 'critical natural capital' conception. And then there is no reason for assuming the incompatibility that Dobson claims.

To make this clear, consider: One might, if one were a 'particularist', think that justice is only owed to members of one's own relatively small community. But if one also subscribes to the 'critical natural capital' conception of 'sustainability', then one may well be worried that the future of one's community depends upon the sustaining of global ecological processes that are presently in peril. Indeed, the 'critical natural capital' conception is supposedly concerned with the preconditions of human life. *A fortiori*, certain global ecological processes are the precondition for human life within one's own community. Now, this will not entail that someone concerned with his or her own community must be concerned with international distributive *justice*. But such a person as described does have good reason to be concerned with international *distributions*, for it is widely argued that severe inequalities in the distribution of resources can have damaging effects on the environment (which is a precondition for continued human life). In short, a 'particularist' may well demand redistributions from his or her community to another community – but not for reasons of international justice. Rather, he or she may well see that redistribution is necessary for the sustaining of those global ecological processes that are 'preconditional' for the survival of his or her own community – that community within which questions of justice arise. Hence there is no clear *incompatibility* between a 'particularist' theory of social justice and the 'critical natural capital' conception of 'sustainability'.

Of course, this counter-argument would carry most weight if future 'generations' mattered. And we might expect such a 'particularist' to be

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY 453

fundamentally concerned only with future 'generations' of his or her own community. But this isn't self-evidently problematic. However, Dobson proceeds to argue that 'the cause of intergenerational justice is poorly served by particularist conceptions of the recipient community of justice' (p. 107). But he concludes this solely on the basis of a discussion of Avner de-Shalit's view, which, according to Dobson, 'is that the ties that bind the transgenerational community together – cultural and moral similarity – decline in strength over time, so our obligations to future generations "fade away" as the ties weaken' (p. 106). But it is far from clear that the relevant aspects of 'cultural and moral similarity' must decline over time. There are very different reasons that communitarians might give for why their community matters. For example, I know of a Muslim who feels that a certain demand made of him by members of his community is wrong, but that for him to ignore it would be tantamount to abandoning fourteen hundred years of tradition, which is, to him, unthinkable. One must assume that, for some, the longer the tradition the greater its value. But if one values one's membership of a community because of its tradition, as many clearly do, then there is no reason for thinking that the ties to future generations are thereby bound to be weak. For it is quite possible to conclude that the further in the future one looks, the longer will be the tradition one values, and (perhaps) therefore the greater the value it will then be seen to possess. But this would hardly justify the presumption that distant future people – those who would be keeping alive the longest tradition – *must* be of less value to a communitarian than those who had kept it alive for a shorter period of time.

Given what I have thus far said about Dobson's rejection of communitarianism, it might be supposed that he is unambiguously committed to treating all distant future persons as if they were of equal value. However, while acknowledging the problems posed for future generations if we employ a social discount rate (for example, he cites Peter Wentz as arguing that a 5 percent positive discount rate makes one life today worth more than sixteen billion lives in a little less than 500 years time), Dobson nevertheless entertains employing a discount rate as a 'crude' rule of thumb (p. 114). Given how disastrous this could prove for distant future persons, one would expect a very good reason for this. So why does Dobson see some need for, in effect, devaluing future persons?

The main reason for his entertaining the employment of a social discount rate is an argument by Peter Laslett and James Fishkin, which Dobson assumes we all agree constitutes a real dilemma (p. 113). The argument is that 'the resources of the human world' are finite, and there are a potentially infinite number of 'generations' which an egalitarian theory of justice seems required to consider; but 'a finite quantity divided by an infinite number must have a zero result – no one gets anything at any time' (quoted pp. 105–6).

454 ALAN CARTER

Fortunately for those concerned about future 'generations', and unfortunately for Dobson's discussion, Laslett's and Fishkin's argument is unsound. More to the point, Dobson cannot deploy it without contradiction. Remarkably, *Justice and the Environment* actually opens with the assertion that life on Earth will have become untenable some time before our sun turns into a Red Giant, swallowing the Earth in the process, in about five billion years time. But then, if there is a time limit to life on Earth, it will not allow an infinite number of humans. So, while the Laslett/Fishkin argument is valid, its second premise is most likely false, and, in any case, contradicted by Dobson's opening remarks.

Perhaps, then, the assumption is that humans could colonize other solar systems before our sun turns into a Red Giant? But Dobson later asserts that 'the train of sustainability hits the buffers of the Second Law of Thermodynamics; the end of the line is a symmetrical and very cold universe in which human aspirations to sustainability and justice have long since vanished from view' (p. 162). In other words, if the Law of Entropy holds, as Dobson asserts, then the second premise of the Laslett/Fishkin argument is *certainly* false.

Well, perhaps space is infinite and there are an infinite number of planets that humans could colonize before time runs out (though how they would have the time to do so must remain a mystery). Only then could there be an infinite number of humans. But then there would be an infinite quantity of resources, and the first premise of the Laslett/Fishkin argument would be false.

Well, then, perhaps there might not be an infinite number of planets, just an infinite number of spaceships carrying the infinite number of humans through an infinitude of space? Agreed, without an infinite number of planets there would probably be a finite quantity of certain resources to distribute. And this would, it seems, generate the dilemma. But if this is so, where would the infinite quantity of resources to build the infinite number of spaceships have come from? And it hardly seems plausible that there would be an infinite quantity of whatever spaceships have to be made from and not an infinite quantity of food, oxygen and water. In any case, it is so implausible that there would be an infinitude of the first without the second (especially as our experience of our world indicates that the kinds of available non-renewable resources needed to build spaceships are in far more limited supply than the resources which renewable air, food and water systems can generate over time), that such a wild presumption could hardly provide a watertight tool for dismantling a theory of justice.

Perhaps, then, and finally, we might hope that the Law of Entropy is false or that it can be circumvented in some science-fiction scenario so that humanity can survive forever, and simply reject Dobson's other remarks about Red Giants and the Second Law of Thermodynamics. But it is notable that Dobson discusses the Laslett/Fishkin argument in the

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY 455

context of the 'critical natural capital' conception of 'sustainability', which, it will be recalled, focuses on the sustainability of the likes of 'ecological processes' at the global level and topsoil and water at the local level (see p. 44). Now, unlike ours, certain human societies survived for millennia without damaging global ecological processes, without ruining their topsoil and without poisoning their water. It is far from certain that human beings cannot survive solely on renewable resources, such as wood for shelter, plants for food and clothing, and stream water for quenching their thirst. And if humanity (perhaps in far smaller numbers within each 'generation' than at present) were to safeguard global ecological processes, topsoil and drinking water by living 'sustainably', and if the Law of Entropy is false, and if the sun doesn't expand or burn out, then the renewable resources that humans could survive on could be 'used' forever. Then (and most probably only then) could humanity survive indefinitely on this planet. And then there might be an infinite number of 'generations'. But this means that if the second premise of the Laslett/Fishkin argument were not in fact false, then were humans to act 'justly' with respect to 'future generations' by living sustainably, the first premise would be. For there would, in effect, be an infinite supply of 'critical natural capital' when measured over the infinite period of time needed for an infinitude of human 'generations'.

Thus, whichever way one looks at it, the argument is clearly unsound, and unsound arguments cannot be deployed effectively to dispense with anything, never mind with a theory of social justice.⁸

Of course, one cannot mention future generations without very quickly coming up against the non-identity problem. Unfortunately, Dobson's discussion of this is no less unsatisfactory. For example, he asserts that 'the paradox' depends on the assumption 'that existence is itself desirable' (p. 115).⁹ Yet it depends on no such thing. Much of the debate was initiated by an argument of Jan Narveson,¹⁰ and developed by Thomas Schwartz,¹¹ who argues that one cannot be made worse off or better off as a result of an action that determines one's existence. Clearly, this has nothing to do with any assumption 'that existence is itself desirable'. For irrespective of whether existence is desirable or undesirable, one would not be made worse off than one would have been had the action not been performed, because then one would not have been! The claim that a person was made worse off by a seemingly harmful action that determined his or her existence would mean that, in Narveson's memorable phrase, 'we would ... have a relative term lacking one relatum'.¹²

Nevertheless, Dobson baldly concludes that what is required is 'a degree of consequentialism' (p. 119). Yet the person-affecting principle (which generates the non-identity problem) took root precisely because of problems in other varieties of consequentialism.¹³ Moreover, Dobson proceeds to write: 'It does need to be pointed out,

456 ALAN CARTER

though, that consequentialism makes little sense in the context of future generations: we cannot monitor consequences in the future, and so from a consequential point of view we can never strictly know whether we have done justice by it' (pp. 128–9). But this seems to confuse 'What is just?' with 'How do we know that we have succeeded in doing the just thing?' Dobson's observation appears to consist in a confusion between ontological and epistemological questions. Consequentialism serves to tell us what to do. And while it is true that we rarely, if ever, know all the consequences of our actions, such ignorance hardly serves to absolve us of our moral requirements or to turn consequentialism into nonsense. For most respectable consequentialist theories argue that we ought to calculate what to do on the basis of something like maximizing *expected* utility (very widely construed). That we would never *know* the outcome is beside the point with respect to determining what we ought to do. For example, dying people will not know the outcome of what may happen to their contemporaries in the very near future, never mind to distant future 'generations', but that doesn't justify them in doing anything they like. (A dying President may never know whether his or her command to launch a nuclear first strike will be acted on. But so what? The significant possibility that his or her command would result in a nuclear war whose outcome would probably be the end of human life is sufficient to make the command immoral in the extreme; and immoral in the extreme on purely consequentialist grounds.)

Of course, having produced his map of 'the dimensions of social justice', Dobson doesn't confine his discussion of the 'critical natural capital' conception to its encounter with aspects of communitarianism. He mentions Nozick, but draws mistaken conclusions, especially regarding appropriating ore from the seabed (see p. 150), for he thinks that Nozick's Lockean Proviso simply concerns making a person worse off, whereas it involves making a person *worse off than the baseline condition*. Dobson further claims that it would be difficult to produce a 'universal legitimization' of the ownership of 'critical natural capital' (see p. 150). But he only provides a cursory discussion of Locke, with no mention of major attempts at justifying private property, such as Kant's and Hegel's,¹⁴ which have nothing like Locke's spoilage and sufficiency provisos – provisos which constitute the basis for Dobson's doubts about justifying the ownership of 'critical natural capital'.

But it is when Dobson turns to the 'encounter' between the 'irreversibility' conception of 'sustainability' and points on his map of 'the dimensions of social justice' that the fundamental confusion within *Justice and the Environment* becomes apparent. And where the confusion is most evident is in his treatment of Rawls. For example, he notes that in a footnote Rawls recognizes 'the possibility, at least, that characteristics often thought to be specific to humans are in fact shared by some non-human animals too' (pp. 169–70). He then levels the

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY 457

following criticism: 'To then make those characteristics determinants for moral concern, and to grant moral concern to humans while withholding it from relevant animals, would amount to what has come to be called "speciesism"' (p. 170). At this point, readers might begin to suspect that Dobson's whole project may well be fundamentally misconceived. And just to confirm the suspicion, after mentioning parakeets as examples of sentient animals, Dobson proceeds to add: 'by his own lights Rawls is inconsistent in excluding sentient animals from the community of justice' (p. 171).

But Rawls, of course, is fundamentally concerned in *A Theory of Justice* with the choice of principles for governing the distribution of those benefits and burdens distributed by the basic structure of a society that comes as close as possible to being a voluntary scheme. Moreover, the principles in question are ones that 'free and equal persons would assent to under circumstances that are fair'.¹⁵ It is sheer nonsense to think that parakeets fall within this fundamental concern. Furthermore, Dobson later remarks that 'Rawls is not precluding concern for animals, it is just that he thinks such concern cannot be motivated by reasons of justice' (p. 181). And towards the end of *Justice and the Environment* Dobson quotes Rawls's remark from p. 512 of *A Theory of Justice* concerning the need for 'a theory of the natural order and our place in it' (quoted at p. 237).

But if one studies the whole of p. 512 of *A Theory of Justice*, one finds Rawls pointing out that 'a conception of justice is but one part of a moral view ... Certainly it is wrong to be cruel to animals and the destruction of a whole species can be a great evil.'¹⁶ Dobson accuses Rawls of granting 'moral concern to humans while withholding it from relevant animals' when Rawls does nothing of the sort. In addition, Dobson asserts that 'by his own lights Rawls is inconsistent in excluding sentient animals from the community of justice' when there is no inconsistency at all. Why is there no inconsistency? Because Rawls thinks that we can be immoral in our treatment of non-human animals but not unjust towards them. What has clearly gone wrong is that Dobson has systematically confused questions of *justice* with questions of *morality*. And Dobson's whole project may well be fundamentally misconceived because of his having been directed towards theories of *justice* as a result of his interest in the environmental justice movement, when the fundamental concerns of the environmental movement seem to be *moral* (possibly even aesthetic) ones.

Thus, by conflating 'justice' and 'morality', Dobson fails to see that the relevant question he should have asked of Rawls and others is: How much further do our moral obligations regarding environmental matters take us beyond, and perhaps even conflict with, the obligations implied by the currently predominant theories of justice? Indeed, this is precisely the question suggested to us at the bottom of p. 512 of *A Theory of*

458 ALAN CARTER

Justice, the final words of Chapter VIII, where immediately after pointing out that ascertaining our moral relations to non-human animals requires a view of the world that it is the task of metaphysics to provide, Rawls ponders: 'How far justice as fairness will have to be revised to fit into this larger theory it is impossible to say. But it seems reasonable to hope that if it is sound as an account of justice among persons, it cannot be too far wrong when these broader relationships are taken into consideration.'¹⁷ This is *highly* contentious. And here is the challenge that needs to be taken up. But Dobson fails to recognize it because of his conflation of 'justice' with 'morality', even when Rawls is explicit in separating these concepts.

Moreover, Dobson later asserts that 'the cardinal principle of distribution associated with liberal justice' is desert (p. 247, and see p. 246). Yet Rawls, who provides the most famous theory of 'liberal justice', explicitly rejects desert as an appropriate principle of distribution.¹⁸ And if we widen our net to include the later Rawls, we can see that Dobson makes even stranger claims. For example, he remarks: '[Brian] Barry's "impartiality" is clearly on a par with Rawls's "deontology" – that is, both theorists regard substantive theories of the good as incompatible with defensible theories of justice' (p. 198). Even overlooking the peculiarity of this assessment of the relationship of Barry's later work to Rawls's, this remark is nothing short of astonishing. Political liberalism is all about the exact opposite of Dobson's characterization of Rawls, for it fundamentally concerns precisely how different substantive theories of the good, so long as they are 'reasonable', may nevertheless support the same theory of justice.

In addition, Dobson appears to assume that liberalism (see pp. 205–6 and p. 246) *must* be impartial between all theories of the good. Joseph Raz's superb book *The Morality of Freedom* is listed in Dobson's bibliography. Yet Raz is a liberal, and his perfectionism most certainly does not adopt a stance of neutrality with respect to all conceptions of the good. (Indeed, neither does Rawls's political liberalism, for the 'political conception of justice as fairness' is not required to accommodate 'unreasonable' conceptions of the good.) In fact, perfectionist liberalism might well constitute a prime candidate for combining environmental concern with a political philosophy. For it does not seem too daunting a task to try to persuade perfectionist liberals that conceptions of the good that are detrimental to the flourishing of future humans ought to be viewed as lacking the value possessed by those conceptions of the good which are not.

All this notwithstanding, Dobson, after proceeding to consider the 'encounter' between the 'natural value' conception of 'sustainability' and points on his map of 'the dimensions of social justice', reaches the unsurprising conclusion that as one moves from the 'critical natural capital' conception through the 'irreversibility' conception to the 'natural

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY 459

value' conception of 'sustainability' then 'points of contact' with the points on his map 'become fewer and further apart' (p. 238). And this is unsurprising, but for the fundamental reason that Dobson systematically overlooks: namely, the further one moves towards the 'natural value' conception, the more one finds oneself confronting questions of morality, and perhaps of aesthetics,¹⁹ rather than questions of justice.

Now, one of the reasons why Dobson sees a potential mismatch between 'sustainability' and theories of justice – which is a major motivation for his study – is that 'the functional relationship between justice and sustainability is nearly always presented as a virtuous one' (p. 241). But, in Dobson's view, it might turn out, in actual fact, not to be. And this would then 'force a difficult choice between sustainability and justice' (p. 241).

I cannot finish without a brief comment on this. For it seems to me that this issue is being viewed by Dobson in completely the wrong way. It seems to me less that justice is 'functional' for sustainability than that injustice is 'dysfunctional' for sustainability. Why do I think this? Because unjust situations ordinarily require highly coercive state apparatuses in order to maintain them (for example, highly unjust economic systems require for their preservation, amongst other things, military personnel and their weaponry). But highly coercive state apparatuses pose a threat to other societies, which are likely to build up their own military capacity in order to defend themselves. Hence, unjust societies are likely to be locked within a dynamic where their governments will need to develop their military capacity in order to remain secure, which requires a highly productive (and correspondingly polluting and resource-consumptive) technology, which requires an unjust and unequal economic system to develop (for the costs of maintaining a credible military threat, as well as funding the specific technological development military competitiveness requires, demands the extraction of a considerable surplus from the civilian population). I have referred to such a situation as an 'environmentally hazardous dynamic'.²⁰ Hence, it seems to me that while it is not the case that a just order is necessarily an environmentally sustainable one, it is the case that an unjust order will inevitably be an environmentally unsustainable one. And this would, in effect, make the relationship between justice and 'sustainability' far more 'virtuous' than Dobson seems willing to admit.

Notes

1 It is worth noting that this has not always been the major preoccupation of political philosophy. It is too easily forgotten by those immersed in present academic debates that the problem of political obligation is a far more central concern of many of the major historical figures within the discipline.

2 Andrew Dobson, *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Dimensions of Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). All subsequent numbers in parentheses within the text refer to page numbers in this book.

460 ALAN CARTER

3 It is odd that Dobson never mentions either the work or the practice of a leading academic figure who is also a leading activist within the environmental justice movement: namely, Bob Willard.

4 See R. A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1956) and Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976).

5 See, for example, Gabriel Almond, 'Introduction: a functional approach to comparative politics' in Gabriel Almond and James Coleman (eds.), *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960).

6 This construal of 'sustainable development' can be found in Alan Carter, 'A Radical Environmentalist Political Theory', *Cogito* 10, 3 (1996), p. 219, n. 37.

7 Anyone who has to teach Rawls to undergraduates will hardly thank Dobson for needlessly giving a central term in current political philosophy a completely different meaning.

8 There is an argument that Dobson could have used that does pose difficulties for intergenerational justice. John Passmore has argued that if we are concerned about the exhaustion of resources in the very long term, then there is simply nothing we can do about it, for 'not even by reducing our consumption of petrol to a thimbleful apiece could we ensure the availability of a similar quantity to our remotest descendants'. John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (London: Duckworth, 1980), p. 78. However, this is complicated by the degree to which other resources might be substitutable for petrol. Nevertheless, it could be argued that even though there will not be an infinite number of future 'generations', there will be enough of them to ensure that an equitable distribution of any finite resource would leave each person with a uselessly small quantity. But this is not the argument that Dobson deploys. And in any case, the Passmore argument is limited to the consumption of finite resources, and it is not clear that 'critical natural capital' needs include them.

9 At this point one might legitimately have expected at least some discussion of Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), Appendix G.

10 See Jan Narveson, 'Utilitarianism and new generations', *Mind* 76 (1967): pp. 62–72.

11 See Thomas Schwartz, 'Obligations to posterity' in R. I. Sikora and Brian Barry (eds.), *Obligations to Future Generations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), and Thomas Schwartz, 'Welfare Judgements and Future Generations', *Theory and Decision*, 11 (1979).

12 Narveson, op. cit., p. 67.

13 For an excellent summary, see Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, 2nd edn. (Athens, Georgia and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), especially Ch. 7.

14 For an account of various attempts at justifying private property, see Alan Carter, *The Philosophical Foundations of Property Rights* (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice-Hall/Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1989). See also Alan Carter, 'The Right to Private Property', *Philosophical Books* 31, 3 (1990), pp. 129–36.

15 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 13.

16 Ibid., p. 512.

17 Ibid.

18 See *ibid.*, pp. 310ff.

19 See Alan Carter, 'Humean Nature', *Environmental Values* 9, 1 (2000), pp. 3–37.

20 See Alan Carter, *A Radical Green Political Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

Part VII
Making a Difference



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

The Ethicist Conception of Environmental Problems

BARNABAS DICKSON

*Holmsgarth
Blackheath
Wenhaston
Suffolk IP19 9ET, UK
Email: bw.dickson@virgin.net*

ABSTRACT

Ethicist assumptions about the causes and solutions of environmental problems are widely held within environmental philosophy. It is typically assumed that an important cause of problems are the attitudes towards the natural environment held by individuals and that problems can be solved by getting people to adopt a more ethical orientation towards the environment. This article analyses and criticises these claims. Both the highly mediated nature of the relationship between individuals and the natural environment and the pervasive pressure on firms in market economies to reduce their costs provide reasons to question the ethicist assumptions.

KEYWORDS

Ethicism, environmental ethics, environmental problems, solutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

A large part of the work done in environmental philosophy has been concerned with questions such as: What are our moral obligations in relation to the natural environment? Are they derived from our obligations to humans? If not, how are they to be understood? However, alongside and underlying these normative concerns can often be found two further claims: a claim about the cause of environmental problems and a claim about the solution of those problems. These claims are typically not developed in any great detail, but they are far-reaching ones. The first claim is that the general attitudes of individuals towards the environment are an important factor in the causation of environmental problems. These attitudes downplay or ignore the value of the natural environment and hence legitimate or justify the heedless exploitation of it. The second claim is that

getting people to adopt a more ethical orientation towards the environment will play an important part in solving environmental problems. Both of these claims can be characterised as ethicist ones, for the first locates the cause of problems in ethically inappropriate attitudes towards the natural environment, and the second maintains that problems can be solved by individuals coming to adopt ethically appropriate attitudes. This article casts doubt on both these claims.

The article begins by defending the view that a wide range of environmental philosophers,¹ who differ from each other in many respects, do make one or both of the ethicist claims. The defence focuses on two debates where the issue of causes and solutions has risen closer to the surface. The first debate is the early controversy about whether a new ethic is needed to deal with the environmental crisis. This argument often turned on the question of whether Judaeo-Christian attitudes to nature have been responsible for causing environmental problems. Those who thought that that tradition was to blame were amongst the keenest advocates of a new ethic. But all the participants in the debate shared the two assumptions that general attitudes towards nature (whether of Judaeo-Christian origin or not) were important in causing problems and that the key to the solution of problems lay in some sort of ethical change in individuals. The second debate, which provides evidence of philosophers making the second ethicist claim in particular, is the more recent discussion about the contribution environmental philosophy is making to the solution of ecological problems. Some hold that philosophy is already making an important contribution, while others are more sceptical. But again, what they all share is the assumption that the solution of problems rests on the adoption of more benign attitudes towards the environment. They simply differ over the current role of philosophy in promoting this change.

The remainder of the article is taken up with criticism of the two ethicist claims. In their most general form the two claims are loose ones, but the ethicists do offer some indications of how one might fill them out. I formulate one determinate version of the first claim and two determinate versions of the second claim and criticise these. In all three cases I treat the claims as claims about the causes and solutions of problems in modern societies. This focus on specific versions of the two claims does limit the scope of the critique, but without characterising the claims with some degree of specificity it is difficult to undertake any critical assessment at all. The main line of criticism is that the ethicists are making large empirical claims about the causes and solutions of environmental problems but they pay insufficient attention to the socio-economic context in which those problems arise and are dealt with. In effect, they abstract from many of the important features of the circumstances in which individuals choose and act. Attending to some of those features indicates the problematic nature of the two claims.

A subsidiary issue in the article is the value of environmental philosophy itself. As has just been noted, some of the evidence that philosophers make the

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

second ethicist claim comes from the debate about the role of environmental philosophy in solving environmental problems. If the second ethicist claim is true it does open the way for the argument that philosophers, through debate and discussion, can contribute to the requisite change of attitudes. In this way the ethicist view of how to solve problems could provide a rationale for the work in normative theory. Conversely, the critique of the second claim will call that rationale into question.

2. THE ETHICIST CLAIMS

The question of whether a new ethic is needed to solve our ecological problems was one of the first issues addressed by practitioners in the emerging field of environmental philosophy. Aldo Leopold's early call for a new ethic had been published in 1949. Nearly twenty years later the historian Lynn White made a similar suggestion and founded this on a historical analysis of the attitudes that had caused the problems. Subsequently, when academic philosophers began to look at environmental issues, White's analysis was challenged in different ways by John Passmore and Robin Attfield. This led both of them to deny that a new ethic is necessary. My purpose, in looking at this debate again, is to identify the assumptions made about the general nature of the causes and solutions of environmental problems that are shared by all the protagonists.

In his famous essay, 'The Land Ethic', Aldo Leopold is chiefly concerned with the solution of environmental problems. He argues that to prevent further ecological destruction, a new ethic is needed. This is the land ethic and it is said to be an 'ecological necessity'.² The land ethic involves an expansion of the moral community. It 'simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals or, collectively: the land.'³ Gaining acceptance for this new ethic will rest upon a reconceptualisation of the land as a biotic pyramid, bound together by relations of dependency, co-operation and competition.⁴

Leopold assumes that the new ethic will be inculcated by education⁵ and he thinks that the primary target for this educational effort should be private landowners. His reason for advocating this particular focus emerges from his criticisms of existing conservation policy, with its emphasis on action by government. For Leopold, the state is too unwieldy and too removed to ensure that appropriate conservation measures are applied. There is a need to change the attitudes of those who are more directly involved in managing the land. As he puts it, the current system of conservation:

tends to relegate to government many functions eventually too large, too complex, or too widely dispersed to be performed by government.

An ethical obligation on the part of the private owner is the only visible remedy for these situations.⁶

Lynn White, in 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', also calls for a new set of values.⁷ But his interest is more with the causes of environmental problems than with their solutions. He wants to identify the beliefs that have led to the current impasse. He sees the ecologic crisis as, in the first instance, a product of the marriage of science and technology in the mid-nineteenth century. It was this union that dramatically accelerated man's impact on the natural environment. But the roots of the crisis lie much deeper. Science and technology themselves have their origins in the Middle Ages⁸ and were shaped and promoted by the dominant Christian assumptions of that time. Specifically, the development of science was encouraged by a version of natural theology according to which it was part of man's task to understand God's mind by understanding his creation; and technology was fostered by the beliefs that man is not part of nature and that God created nature for man to use as he chose.⁹

According to White these attitudes are themselves deeply embedded in Western culture and widely shared.

Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians.¹⁰

This is why he holds that any solutions to the ecologic crisis must rest on a widespread change in these basic, underlying beliefs. White's own suggestion is that we should replace the orthodox Christian view of nature with what he regards as the heretical view of St Francis. The chief element in the Franciscan view is a belief in 'the equality of all creatures, including man'.¹¹ White proposes Francis as 'a patron saint for ecologists'.¹²

In contrast with those, like White, who offer an unqualified condemnation of Western Christianity as the original source of the attitudes that have caused environmental problems, John Passmore, in his book, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, offers a more nuanced critique of the Christian tradition.¹³ He suggests that the problematic attitudes to nature originated not in the Hebraic sources of Christian belief but in a Christianity that was influenced by Greek thought and by Stoicism in particular. It was the Stoics who held that everything was made for man. As Passmore puts it, 'If, then, one can speak of "Christian arrogance" in supposing that all things are made for men, it must be with the proviso that it is not Hebraic-Christian but Graeco-Christian "arrogance"'.¹⁴ Moreover, while Passmore holds that the Stoic-Christian view can certainly encourage exploitative attitudes to nature, a further, crucial step was taken when this view was coupled with the Baconian-Cartesian belief that it is man's duty and within his capacity to make the world a better place.¹⁵ It was this combination that 'can either provoke or be used to justify a scientific-technological revolution';¹⁶ and it is this revolution that has been the direct cause of many of our environmental problems.

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

Passmore also differs from White, and from Leopold, on the question of whether environmental problems are to be solved by the adoption of a new ethic. He is scornful of the claim that it will be possible to persuade people to accept values that have no connection with previously accepted ones.¹⁷ But he also thinks that this is unnecessary. For he holds that there are at least two traditions within Western civilisation that encourage a more benign attitude to the natural environment.¹⁸ The first of these is the Stewardship tradition – itself a minority tradition within Christianity – which sees man as ‘a farm-manager, actively responsible as God’s deputy for the care of the world’.¹⁹ The second tradition holds that ‘man’s responsibility is to perfect nature by co-operating with it’.²⁰ This tradition has its roots in German Idealism. These traditions, perhaps with others, provide the basis for a more appropriate attitude to nature. So all that is necessary is to develop certain strains that are already present in Western thought. The solution of environmental problems will require individuals to adopt values that are new to them in the sense that they have not previously been committed to them. But these values will not be new to Western culture. What the West needs, he writes, ‘is not so much a “new ethic” as more general adherence to a perfectly familiar ethic’.²¹

On the further question of *whose* attitudes need to be changed, Passmore is closer to White than to Leopold in that he thinks that it is the attitudes of the large mass of people that need to change, rather than those of one particular group. But unlike White, he places this need for large-scale change in a specifically political context. He thinks that simply trying to persuade large numbers of people to act in a more environmentally benign way, while it may help, will not usually be enough. For example, having noted that inventing a device that will solve a pollution problem will not be sufficient, he adds that it will be necessary to persuade people to use it. But he then continues: ‘And in many instances something more will be required: to persuade the State to coerce its citizens into using it.’²² He holds that in liberal democratic societies such action by the State will itself rest on prior persuasion. For the introduction of coercive environmental legislation will only come about as a result of democratic pressure and this pressure will only be generated when environmentalists have convinced large numbers of people of the merits of their case.²³ Thus, for Passmore it is important to change the attitudes of the large mass of people not so much because this will lead them to behave in more directly environmentally sensitive ways, but because it will cause them to put pressure on their political representatives, so that environmental legislation will be introduced. A widespread change of attitudes is important because of the change it will effect through the political system.

Robin Attfield, in his contribution to the ‘new ethic’ debate, disagrees with both White and Passmore about which attitudes are responsible for ecological problems. He absolves Christianity almost completely, in large part because he

BARNABAS DICKSON

thinks that the Stewardship tradition has been much more central to Christianity than Passmore allows. In his view 'the Judaeo-Christian tradition has historically stressed responsibility for nature and that not only in the interest of human beings.'²⁴ Instead, Attfield lays the blame on the belief in material progress that emerged from the Enlightenment.

Rather than the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity, the attitude in large measure responsible for environmental degradation in East and West has been the belief in perennial material progress inherited from the Enlightenment and the German metaphysicians, as modified in the West by the classical economists and sociologists, by liberal individualism and by social Darwinism, and in Eastern Europe by the unquestioned deference accorded to Marx and to Engels.²⁵

It is because the Stewardship tradition has been so strong that there is no need to invent a new ethic in order to solve environmental problems. He holds that the idea of Stewardship, and related notions, 'may well be considered to offer materials from which an environmental ethic, equal to our current problems, can be elicited without the need for the introduction of a new ethic to govern our transactions with nature.'²⁶ So rather like Passmore, Attfield holds that the solution of environmental problems will involve a change in attitudes, but not the adoption of a new ethic. What is needed is a more widespread and sincere commitment to values already present in Western culture. As he puts it

[W]hat is required is not so much a replacement of moral traditions (if that were possible) or even their supplementation with new principles, as the more promising endeavour of developing in a more consistent manner themes to which at least lip-service has long been paid.²⁷

Attfield appears to side with White and Passmore against Leopold in holding that the change of attitudes must be a widespread one. He does not directly address the question of whether this change of attitudes will achieve its effect by changing the way most people behave in their immediate interactions with the natural environment, or through the political system, as Passmore suggests. Some of his remarks imply that he would see both routes as important.²⁸

In this debate about a new ethic White, Passmore and Attfield disagree about which attitudes are to blame. They also differ from each other, and from Leopold, about the attitudes that people must adopt in order to solve ecological problems. But for all their differences what they share is the view that certain general attitudes to nature play an important role in the causation of problems. These attitudes legitimate the heedless exploitation of nature and can be termed 'legitimizing attitudes'. The authors also hold that bringing it about that people adopt environmentally benign attitudes will play an important part in realising solutions. This is the common ground on which they fight out their differences.

It is the common commitment to the ethicist claims that is of interest here, rather than their differences over the content of the causally significant attitudes.

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

Nevertheless, there are *other* differences between them, concerning the way in which attitudes exert their causal influence, that are relevant when it comes to characterising more specific versions of the ethicist claims. I will return to this issue shortly.

The new ethic debate is not the only argument that provides evidence of environmental philosophers who differ from each other in important respects sharing the ethicist assumptions. Three recent collections of papers have been largely devoted to a consideration of the role of environmental philosophy in solving environmental problems.²⁹ Several of the participants disagree about the role of philosophy, at least as currently constituted, but nevertheless share the ethicist view that solutions rest on a change of attitudes.

Bryan Norton does not exaggerate much when he suggests that Baird Callicott's vision of philosophy, as expressed in his paper 'Environmental Philosophy is Environmental Activism' is a heroic one.³⁰ In the first paragraph Callicott mentions the death sentence passed on Socrates as evidence of the threat that philosophy can pose to established beliefs and practices. For him, philosophy appears to be 'the most potent force of social change imaginable'.³¹

Consistently with this view Callicott thinks that environmental philosophy is already playing a major role in solving environmental problems. It does so in virtue of the part it plays in deconstructing the dualistic-mechanistic worldview that is at the root of our present problems and in promoting a new ecological-organic worldview.³² He refers to the change as a 'paradigm-shift' in our culture and it is clear that he envisages a change in the attitudes of the large mass of people.³³ The role of philosophy in bringing about this change is to provide the intellectual resources that are needed to make a persuasive case for the new worldview. These resources include a critique of the old attitudes and the development and articulation of the new ones.³⁴ Thus Callicott arrives at the view that

We speculative environmental philosophers are inescapably environmental activists...in thinking, talking and writing about environmental ethics, environmental philosophers already have their shoulders to the wheel, helping to reconfigure the prevailing cultural worldview and thus helping to push general practice in the direction of environmental responsibility.³⁵

Other authors are more sceptical than Callicott about whether environmental philosophy, in its present form, is actually making a contribution to the solution of environmental problems. Alastair Gunn implies that environmental philosophers are sometimes motivated by a desire to 'make a difference'.³⁶ But in answer to the question posed in the title of his paper 'Can Environmental Ethics Save the World?' he suggests that, at least for the moment, it cannot. The reason is as follows:

Too much recent environmental philosophy has been marred by obscurantism, debates about the merits of high-level theories, and romantic and simplistic stere-

BARNABAS DICKSON

otypes of diverse cultures. A major shortcoming of some environmental ethics is that it is written abstractly, sometimes in language largely unintelligible to anyone but a handful of scholars.³⁷

However, despite this negative assessment of the current contribution made by environmental philosophy, Gunn is insistent that it could play a role: 'philosophers *can* contribute to the development of an environmentally sustainable culture.'³⁸ He then outlines some of the contributions that an appropriately reconfigured environmental philosophy could make. They include: challenging 'the assumptions of those who profess to think that there is no environmental problem';³⁹ undermining bad arguments against environmentally sound action;⁴⁰ and 'clarifying and arguing for concepts and values that are central to an environmentally sustainable culture'.⁴¹ In other words, philosophy can make a contribution to the solution of environmental problems because of the part it can play in persuading people to adopt environmentalist values.

There are some indications that Gunn thinks that this change of attitudes will be necessary both because it will lead individuals to behave in a more responsible fashion in their own direct interactions with the natural environment, and because it will cause them to push for political change.⁴² In some places he implies that the change of attitudes (however it achieves the desired effect) will need to be a widespread one. He says that 'an environmental ethic will work if it is both widely accepted and integrated into everyday life.'⁴³ But he seems to put a greater emphasis on changing the views of one particular group in society, the environmental professionals. In discussing the potential role of philosophers he says

Most important...is education. In particular, we can expand our work with environmental professionals and lay people...As well as working on projects with environmental groups and professionals, philosophers should be pushing for ethics courses to be part of the education of environmental professionals such as engineers, planners, and architects.⁴⁴

This suggestion, that educational efforts should be focused on the group of people most directly concerned with what happens to the natural environment, has parallels with Leopold's emphasis on educating landowners.

There are also similarities between Gunn's views and those of Eugene Hargrove, the editor of *Environmental Ethics*. Hargrove thinks that until now environmental philosophy has failed to make much of a contribution to the solution of environmental problems. In 1989 he noted that 'environmental ethics has as yet had little practical influence on environmental affairs and is unlikely to have much in the immediate future.'⁴⁵ Nearly five years later he found his earlier prediction to have been sound, writing 'it is still not having much impact for a field that has been in existence for nearly two decades.'⁴⁶ Like Gunn, Hargrove thinks that the problem is connected with the theoretical nature of

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

environmental philosophy, which makes it difficult for those not trained in the field to understand. Along with Gunn he also holds that the problem can be remedied. But he thinks that because environmental ethics offers such a deep and wide-ranging challenge to existing philosophical assumptions it is ineradicably theoretical. He therefore offers a different sort of solution. Making environmental ethics more accessible is not an option. Rather, if it is to have an influence the intended audience needs to acquire a better grounding in philosophy. Hargrove, again like Gunn, thinks that the intended audience is not the public at large but a much smaller group, constituted of environmental professionals.⁴⁷ At present, this group has 'an abysmal knowledge of philosophy'⁴⁸ and they 'need to know enough about rights theory and value theory to be able to interact with professionals who deal with such issues'.⁴⁹ Since the problem is an urgent one 'they will have to be trained in environmental ethics as quickly as possible'.⁵⁰ The task for philosophers is to undertake this education. So where Gunn thinks it is the way in which environmental philosophy is presented that needs to be changed, Hargrove maintains that it is the audience that must be changed, by undergoing a crash course in philosophy. But if environmental philosophers can meet this challenge then they will be contributing directly to the solution of environmental problems.

In sum, Callicott, Gunn and Hargrove have different views of the role of environmental philosophy in solving environmental problems. Callicott has a positive assessment of the role philosophy is already playing, while the other two think that it is not contributing much at present, but that it could do so in the future if certain changes took place. Gunn and Hargrove, in turn, differ about the nature of the changes that are needed. However, underlying their disagreements all these authors share the assumption that in the solution of ecological problems a very important part will be played by persuading people to adopt a more ethical orientation towards the natural environment. It is because they agree that the solution of problems will have this general form that they agree that there is a potential role for philosophy to play. Their disagreements are simply about whether environmental philosophy, as currently constituted, is actually fulfilling this potential. As with the earlier debate about a new ethic, the debate about the role of philosophy is grounded in a common commitment to the ethicist claim about how problems are to be solved.

The two ethicist claims are independent of one another. One could endorse the first claim while rejecting the second. One might, for example, think that legitimating attitudes have played an important part in causing environmental problems but hold that because they are so deeply ingrained it is not possible to change those attitudes; some other way of solving the problem must be found. Conversely, one could make the second claim, but not the first. One might maintain that legitimating attitudes have not played any significant role in causing problems but that getting people to adopt environmentalist values will

play an important part in solving them. Nevertheless, we have seen that a number of environmental philosophers do make both claims.⁵¹

The claims are very wide in scope. They purport to tell us something about the causes and solutions of all environmental problems. It is also the case that they tend to be formulated very loosely. They could be filled out in various ways. In order to arrive at more determinate versions of these claims a number of questions would need to be answered. Four such questions will be mentioned here. The ethicists themselves offer some clues about how to answer some of these questions.

The first question is whether the ethicist claim about the causation of problems is primarily a claim about the role of legitimating attitudes that were held *in the past*, or whether it is a claim about attitudes that are held *now*. Much of the evidence that environmental thinkers make the first claim emerges from the debate about the historical provenance of legitimating attitudes, and there are grounds for treating the claim in the former way. The second question concerns the causal route by which legitimating attitudes have their effect on the natural environment. Do they do so fairly directly by, for example, shaping the way in which individuals interact with the natural environment, or is it by some more indirect route? If it is by a more indirect route then it might be the case that attitudes held in the past are a cause, through an intermediary, of present problems. As was seen earlier, White and Passmore both seem to endorse something like this last-mentioned possibility, when they suggest that damaging attitudes have had their effect by promoting the rise of science and technology and it is the combination of science and technology that has been the direct cause of environmental problems. On the other hand, Passmore also makes remarks that indicate that he thinks that presently held attitudes are responsible for causing current problems.⁵²

The question of the directness of the causal route between attitudes and environmental consequences also arises in relation to the second claim. Leopold and Hargrove both imply that the adoption of an environmental ethic will be important because it affects how those who adopt the new attitudes will behave in their direct interactions with the natural environment. Passmore, in contrast, holds that the change will be important because it affects which policies individuals will support in the political arena. Gunn and Atfield imply that both routes are significant.

The third question concerns the number of people whose attitudes are at issue. Most of those who endorse the first ethicist claim seem to assume that legitimating attitudes are widely held and this is why they have the effect they do. Similarly, with regard to the second claim Passmore is quite explicit that it is the attitudes of the large mass of people that need to be changed. There must be majority support for environmentally sound policies amongst the electorate. But Leopold, Gunn and Hargrove all put at least some emphasis on the idea that

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

solutions will rest on changing the attitudes of a much smaller group within society.

The fourth and most difficult question concerns the term 'important' which appears in both claims. If it is said that legitimating attitudes play an *important* part in causing problems and that the adoption of environmentalist values will play an *important* part in solving problems, then both claims will remain significantly indeterminate unless that term is explicated. Any such explication will have to spell out relationship between the causal factors that have been identified as important and other contributory factors. Some of the authors do comment on this issue, but only in a general sort of way. The gist of their remarks is typically that ideas are important in comparison to more 'material' factors. White says 'What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them'⁵³ and 'What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship'.⁵⁴ Callicott interprets White as an opponent of materialist explanations and for this reason applauds White's essay as 'the seminal paper in environmental ethics'.⁵⁵ He goes on to characterise himself as 'a philosopher affirming the power of ideas'.⁵⁶ Attfield also tackles the issue in *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*. In contrast to those who would cite population, affluence, technology, capitalism and growth as the main culprit he asserts that ideas are important in causing environmental problems.⁵⁷ He wants to ground this in a claim about the historical role of ideas in general. He suggests that the prevalence of certain beliefs and attitudes may be a pre-condition of material or efficient causes taking effect;⁵⁸ that ideas may play an indispensable role in historical developments;⁵⁹ and later on he insists that the significance of ideas should not be underplayed.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, Attfield never ties these scattered remarks together in this work. It is not clear, for example, what might be meant by his suggestion that attitudes are *not* efficient causes. Indeed, the chief difficulty of interpreting the comments of all three authors is that their remarks remain at a high level of generality. They do not specify the content of either the position they wish to defend or of the 'materialism' they see themselves as opposed to. They thus fail to shed any light on how the ethicist claims about the importance of attitudes and changes of attitude might be explicated in a way that would render the claims more determinate.

Putting the fourth question on one side, the ethicists have offered some suggestions for filling out their two claims in several ways without, for the most part, developing the suggestions in any great detail. In what follows I have been partly guided by these suggestions in formulating somewhat more determinate versions of the claims. The criticisms that I offer have two aims. The first aim is to show that the ethicists' large empirical claims pay insufficient attention to the social context. If the ethicists wish to defend their claims then they will have to show that they are consistent with the circumstances that obtain in modern

societies. The second aim is to suggest that they will not be able to do this. I provide some grounds for thinking that the social context is such as to render their claims implausible. To go further than this and to supply something closer to a demonstration that the two claims are false would require more detailed empirical argument than is within the scope of this article.

3. CONSUMING THE ENVIRONMENT

The first ethicist claim is that legitimating attitudes play an important part in causing ecological problems. As has just been noted, formulated in this way the claim is a loose one and a number of more determinate variants are possible. In this section I shall focus on a version that assumes that the claim is about the role of attitudes, held currently by the majority of people, in causing present-day problems in modern societies. This still leaves the question of the route by which these attitudes cause problems unanswered. The ethicists themselves offer only a few clues. One possibility is that the legitimating attitudes affect what people do in their direct, daily interaction with the natural environment as they endeavour to meet their needs and satisfy their desires. White certainly suggests that in the medieval period legitimating attitudes had their impact in this way. He says that by destroying pagan animism, with its reverence for the natural world, Christianity made it possible for individuals to cut down trees, mine mountains and damn brooks 'in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects'.⁶¹ However, when the ethicist claim is treated as a claim about how problems are caused now, in modern societies, it faces the obvious objection that in such societies most people are not directly involved in many of the interactions with the natural environment on which they depend. In these societies a person's direct involvement in such things as growing the food crops he eats, generating the electricity he uses, manufacturing the car he travels in or disposing of the wastes he produces, is typically small or non-existent. At most a person might be more directly involved in a few of the interactions with nature. Perhaps he works in the oil industry. But even then he may not have much influence on the way in which, say, oil extraction takes place and hence on the environmental harm that attends it. In any case, there will still be many other interactions with nature on which he depends and in which he has no direct involvement at all. If this is so then the claim that legitimating attitudes cause people to damage the natural environment in the course of their daily interactions with that environment is based on a false presupposition and should be discarded. Whatever the relationship in modern societies between individuals and the natural environment on which they depend, it is of a more mediated kind than this first version allows. It is only in circumstances where people are less fully integrated into modern societies that they are likely to meet their needs through more direct

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

interactions with the natural environment. Of course, there are many people in the contemporary world who are in just such circumstances, but in this article the ethicist claims are not being treated as claims about these people.

If the ethicist is to claim that the legitimating attitudes possessed by the large mass of people in modern societies play an important role in causing environmental problems, then he needs to be able to point to some way in which the actions of these people do contribute to environmental damage. If that can be established the ethicist is then in a position to claim that their legitimating attitudes do play a role in causing people to perform those actions.

There is at least one way in which the actions of the large mass of people in modern societies do contribute to environmental damage. For although most people are not directly involved in the interactions with nature on which they depend, they do consume the products of those interactions and utilise the services that rest upon such interactions. Indeed, many of the mundane actions a person performs (turning on a heater, eating breakfast, driving to work) involve such consumption and utilisation. By consuming these products and services a person provides a signal to producers that they can expect demand for these products and services to continue. He thus contributes to the decision of the producers to produce in the future and in this way his consumptive actions do contribute to the future environmental harm that attends such production.

If it is granted that the consumptive actions of the large mass of people do contribute to environmental damage in this way, the ethicist can then claim that people perform those actions, with their harmful consequences, because they possess legitimating attitudes. So on this version of the first ethicist claim, legitimating attitudes have their effect by causing people to engage in consumptive actions that, in turn, have the effect of causing producers to continue to produce in the future in ways that harm the environment. This version of the first ethicist claim is not one that is explicitly articulated by any of the environmental philosophers discussed earlier. But it is more plausible than the version that relied on the false assumption that in modern societies people satisfy most of their needs and desires through direct interactions with the natural environment. Nevertheless, it is open to criticism and the problem is again connected with the mediated relationship between individuals and the natural environment. It will be argued here that because of the highly mediated relation between the consumptive actions of agents and their harmful consequences, individuals are unlikely to see themselves as responsible for those consequences. If people do not see themselves as responsible for those consequences then there will not be much reason to think that their legitimating attitudes are doing much work in causing them to perform actions with those consequences.⁶²

This argument owes something to Samuel Scheffler's contention that developments in modern society call into question our common-sense notion of normative responsibility.⁶³ Scheffler's view is that this notion of responsibility

is supported by a particular phenomenology of action in which 'acts have primacy over omissions, near effects have primacy over remoter effects, and individual effects have primacy over group effects.'⁶⁴ He argues that because of the increasingly complex and interdependent nature of modern societies, omissions are at least as morally significant in their consequences as action, remote effects as significant as near effects and group effects as significant as individual effects. But since our phenomenology of actions treats these effects as much *less* important, our ordinary sense of responsibility fails to encompass the full significance of our acts and omissions. Arguing along similar lines, I shall identify five features of the relationship between consumptive actions and environmental consequences typical of modern societies. Each of these will tend to weaken the agent's sense of responsibility for the environmental harms that are a consequence of those actions.

The first feature is that a person contributes to environmental damage through his consumptive actions only via the actions of other agents. It is other people who are actually engaged in the interactions with the environment that result in damage occurring. While his consumptive actions do contribute to the signals producers receive, and these signals are one factor that cause these producers to continue to act as they do, it is not he himself who performs the actions that damage the environment. Since our existing phenomenology of agency attributes more importance to consequences that flow directly from our actions than to consequences that arise only through the actions of other agents, his sense of responsibility for the environmental harms that result from his consumptive actions will be correspondingly reduced. If farmers pollute the land with the pesticides and fertilisers they use, that is not something for which the consumer is directly responsible. He just eats their produce. The fact that a person contributes to environmental damage only via the actions of others reflects one aspect of the highly differentiated nature of modern societies. As has already been noted, for any particular form of interaction with nature it will typically be the case that only a small proportion of people will be engaged in that activity. Most of the rest of us contribute to that activity only through our consumptive actions.

The second feature is that a person contributes to the signals received by those who engage directly in interactions with the environment only in conjunction with many others. Producers respond to the signals sent not by any one individual consumer but to the signals generated by the consumptive actions of very many consumers. Where there is sufficient consumption the producers are likely to continue to produce, perhaps in environmentally damaging ways. Where a person contributes to some effect with many others this will typically reduce his sense of responsibility for that effect. The larger the number of others involved the more his sense of responsibility will be reduced. By buying coffee a person contributes to the signals received by coffee producers, but only in combination with similar actions by many other coffee drinkers. His sense of responsibility

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

for any environmental harm that attends coffee production is likely to be correspondingly diminished. The fact that a person contributes with many others to the signals received by producers reflects the point that in modern societies people are often embedded in very large markets, frequently extending across national boundaries, with huge numbers of individual consumers.^{65, 66}

The third feature is that the environmental harm associated with production often occurs at a considerable spatial distance from the consumption of the product. This is likely to weaken the consumer's sense of responsibility for that harm. The existence of this spatial gap may be partly the result of natural factors. Production might take place next door to consumption, but it is possible for the dangerous by-products to be carried some distance by the sea or in the atmosphere, so that environmental harm manifests itself elsewhere. But the spatial gap can often be attributed to the geographical spread of markets. In modern societies the products a person consumes are not infrequently made in some other part of the world and the environmental harm associated with production is likely to be correspondingly distant.

If it were the case that the environmental harm that a person's consumptive actions contribute to is also temporally distant from him, it would tend to further diminish his sense of responsibility. It is clear that environmental damage may occur some time after the actions that give rise to it. This will be the case when there are threshold effects that only occur after a long build-up. However, it is not obvious that this type of temporal gap will be a distinctive feature of modern societies. Indeed, one of the characteristics of contemporary markets is the speed with which producers respond to signals from consumers and this is a feature that will tend to reduce the temporal gap between consumption and the environmental harm that it contributes to. So in arguing for a highly mediated relation between consumptive actions and environmental harm, I will not rely on the claim that the latter are temporally distant from the former.

In addition to the fact that environmental harms are often spatially distant it is also often the case – and this is the fourth feature – that those effects will be dispersed in space as well. When a person buys a new computer he contributes not just to the signals received by the producer of his computer but to the signals received by all computer producers (and by all the manufacturers of computer components). And these may be spread across the globe. So if there is some environmental harm associated with the production of computers it is very unlikely that there will be one place, even one distant place, where that harm occurs. This will tend to further diminish a person's sense of responsibility. A person is more likely to feel responsible for harms that are concentrated in one specific location than for an equivalent amount of harm that is widely dispersed. The fact that the effects of a consumptive action may be dispersed is a consequence of the way in which, in modern societies, production is often dispersed, sometimes across the globe. On occasion natural processes will counteract the effects of dispersal. The concentration of toxins higher up the food

chain is one example of this. On a global scale the formation of a hole in the ozone layer is another. Nevertheless, these cases seem to be more the exception than the rule.⁶⁷

Finally, in addition to the effect of each of these four features in weakening an agent's sense of responsibility, several of them will do so indirectly by tending to increase the agent's ignorance of the consequences. If environmental harms only occur through the intervention of other agents, or if those harms are distant or dispersed in space, then a person will probably know less about those harms. The less he knows about the environmental consequences of his actions the less likely he is to feel responsible for them.⁶⁸ Of course, the same developments in communications and mass media that help make possible the emergence of global markets also make it easier for an agent to acquire information about the remote consequences of his actions. But typically it is only a few types of environmental harm that will be of interest to the media or the public at any one time. An agent will usually remain ignorant of most of the consequences of most of his consumptive actions. In any case the sheer range and extent of those consequences make it difficult even in principle for him to acquire knowledge of more than some of them.

Overall, the effect of living in modern complex societies, where a person's dependent relationship on the natural environment is often a mediated one and takes the form of consuming the goods and services produced by others, is to reduce his sense of responsibility for the environmentally harmful consequences of his consumptive actions. Not all the five features mentioned here will be present in all cases where his actions contribute to environmental harm and they will not always weaken his sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, several of them will often be present, and where they are they will tend to have that effect. In these cases it is unlikely that legitimating attitudes will play a role in causing the agent to perform those actions. He will not see himself as responsible for the harm that is caused by his actions and so the attitude that it is legitimate to cause such harm is not likely to play a big part in causing him to perform actions with those consequences.

This argument casts doubt on one version of the first ethicist claim. It has done so not by questioning whether individuals possess legitimating attitudes, or by denying that individuals perform actions with environmentally harmful consequences. Rather, it has been contended that, because of the mediated relation between the actions and the consequences in modern societies, there is little reason to think that legitimating attitudes play much part in causing those actions. If the ethicists wished to challenge this conclusion they would need to show that despite the mediated relationship between consumptive actions and environmental consequences, there are grounds for thinking that legitimating attitudes play an important part in causing people to perform those actions. As it is, they barely address the question of the causal route by which legitimating attitudes lead to environmental damage. Far less do they provide any evidence to support a particular account of that route.

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

4. SOLVING PROBLEMS

The second ethicist claim is that the solution of environmental problems rests on the adoption of a more ethical orientation towards the environment. One possible version of this claim corresponds to the version of the first claim that was discussed in the previous section. According to this version of the second claim, which can be termed the eco-consumerist version, one can solve problems by persuading large numbers of people to adopt environmentalist values. These people would then tend to choose goods and services that had been produced in ways that did not damage the environment and this, in turn, would provide an incentive for producers to avoid harming the environment. This view of how to solve problems does have some popularity within the environmental movement. However, the criticisms that were made of the corresponding version of the first ethicist claim are also relevant to the assessment of eco-consumerism. The highly mediated relation between consumptive actions and environmental improvements makes it unlikely that enough people can be persuaded to express environmental values through their consumption in a sufficiently consistent and thoroughgoing way to have a significant impact on environmental problems. In any case, the thinkers discussed earlier advocate not eco-consumerism, but two other versions of the second ethicist claim and it is these that will be considered here. Both of these versions involve an implicit acknowledgement of some of the complexities of modern societies. But this acknowledgement is only a partial one and they ignore the possibility that there may exist systematic pressures against protecting the environment.

The first version recognises the highly differentiated nature of modern societies. It holds that a relatively small group of people in society play a particularly important role in determining the nature of our interactions with the natural environment, and hence in determining whether environmental damage occurs. These are people who, in the course of their work, take decisions that shape the way in which the environment is used. They can be termed key environmental agents. According to this version it is the key environmental agents who must be persuaded to adopt the new environmental values. Once this has happened they will no longer take decisions that allow environmental harm to occur. Elements of this position are found in Leopold, Gunn and Hargrove.

One of the apparent attractions of this view is that it implies that our persuasive efforts can be focused on a group that is both small and easily identifiable. If there were such a group, it would make the task of bringing about a change of values more manageable than it might otherwise be. But it can be objected that the people who make important decisions affecting the environment do not constitute a neatly circumscribed group. The fact that Leopold holds that it is landowners who must be re-educated, while Gunn mentions planners, engineers and architects, indicates that the group may be larger and more diverse than either of them assume. Indeed, almost all human productive activities have the potential to damage the environment and many managers working in many

different sectors are likely to be making decisions that have a significant impact on the natural environment. There may be no easy way of singling them out. So the task of persuading them to adopt new values may be more difficult than the proponents of this version of the second ethicist claim assume. This is not a fatal objection but it may weaken the appeal of this version.

The more powerful objection is that in modern societies most organisations that are engaged in significant interactions with nature and who face choices about whether or not to take action to conserve the environment, are under pressure to keep costs down. This is true of both private firms, where it is a consequence of the pursuit of profit in competitive markets, and state agencies. The pressure is not omnipresent, but it is common and it is often strong. Since the environmentally sound option will typically cost more than the non-environmental option, the pressure will frequently translate into pressure to choose the non-environmental option.⁶⁹

For a key environmental agent this pressure is likely to manifest itself in the array of costs and benefits (in the widest sense) that are associated with the different courses of action open to her.⁷⁰ The pressure will not have its impact simply by *constraining* the choices open to agents. It will also entail that positive incentives are associated with particular courses of action. For example, choosing the cheaper, non-environmental option is likely to do more to secure her job and to increase her chances of advancement. This in turn will promote her ability to fulfil commitments and pursue other interests outside work. Less tangible rewards may also be affected, such as the self-respect that comes from a successful career. Consistently choosing the more expensive, environmental option is likely to have the opposite consequences, threatening her job, her income and her self-esteem.

If a key environmental agent is faced with this array of costs and benefits it will probably be difficult to get her to adopt and then act on environmental values. There are a number of reasons why this could be so. It may be that she recognises that too much of what she regards as important is bound up with acting in ways contrary to those values for her to endorse them. Or perhaps she can be persuaded to adopt the new values, but she does not then act in accordance with them. This, in turn, may be because she thinks that the obligations created by these new values are rationally outweighed by other considerations, such as her duties to her dependants. Or it might be that she would act on the new values were it not that she believes that the number of other agents who will do likewise is too low to bring about a significant improvement in the environment.

But even in cases where the agent is persuaded of the new values and does act in accordance with them, it may not ensure that the environmental option will be consistently chosen in the long term. For the same pressure to reduce costs that shape the benefits and costs associated with choosing the various options will also shape the choices facing her superiors. So if she acts on the new values she may find herself shifted sideways into another post or out of a job altogether. Or

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

perhaps, aware of these likely outcomes, she resigns to take up a different, less environmentally harmful occupation. In all these cases her post is likely to be filled by someone who is prepared to choose the non-environmental option.

The objection to the ethicist claim that one can solve problems by persuading key environmental agents to adopt environmental values is that this pervasive pressure to reduce costs is likely to provide a major stumbling block in the way of the ethicist solution.⁷¹ It is not being argued that there are no cases where a key environmental agent is persuaded to adopt environmentalist values, remains in her job, and acts according to those values. Rather the suggestion is that the systematic and powerful nature of this pressure in modern societies makes this unlikely except in a small number of cases. The ethicist remedy would only be likely to work if key environmental agents did not frequently face a persistent, powerful pressure to choose the non-environmental option.

These criticisms of the first version of the second ethicist claim cast some doubt on the explanation given by Gunn and Hargrove, who defend this version, of why environmental ethics has not had much impact in solving environmental problems. They explain its failure to have had much influence until now in terms of certain specific features of environmental ethics and its prospective audience. Gunn holds that, as currently practised, environmental ethics is too obscure and Hargrove maintains that the audience lacks a grasp of basic philosophical concepts. Both authors think that these defects can be remedied. However, the argument just advanced suggests that the failure to contribute to the solution of ecological problems is due not to any contingent and remediable features of environmental ethics and its audience, but to the more basic fact that the pressure to reduce costs will typically translate into pressure on key environmental agents to choose the non-environmental option. It is this that makes it difficult to solve environmental problems by persuading them to adopt environmentalist values. Making environmental ethics more accessible or teaching these agents more philosophy would not weaken this pressure.

There is another version of the second ethicist claim that appears to avoid some of these difficulties. It holds that environmental problems can be solved, in the first instance, by the state adopting appropriate policies. The aim of these policies will be to change the circumstances in which corporate agencies, such as private firms, engage in interactions with the natural environment, so that it becomes rational for them to choose the environmental option. The state has a variety of tools it can use to alter the framework within which private firms make decisions. It can ban certain activities; it can regulate others so that they have to conform to certain standards; or it can provide economic incentives for the preferred option and penalties for the less favoured options.

What makes this version a version of the ethicist claim is the account that is given of how the state will come to adopt environmental policies of this sort. It is maintained that, at least in liberal democracies, the state will change its policies when a sufficiently large proportion of the electorate support this change and that

this will come about when they have been persuaded to adopt a more ethical orientation towards the environment. This version, therefore, combines a claim about the importance of politically imposed solutions to environmental problems with an ethicist view of how state policy towards the environment is determined. While it allows for the use of economic tools, such as environmental taxes, in solving problems, the justification for their use is not that they will promote Pareto efficiency, but that they will help to realise environmentalist values. Of the authors considered earlier, Passmore is the clearest exponent of the electoralist version of the second ethicist claim.

This version has the advantage over the earlier version that it goes some way towards recognising the nature and magnitude of what is needed to solve environmental problems. Instead of putting all the emphasis on bringing about an ethical change in key environmental agents, it proposes that significant alterations must be made to the regulatory framework faced by the organisations in which those agents work. Once those alterations are in place it will then be in the corporate interest to choose the environmental option. The non-environmental option will have become illegal, or too expensive, or undesirable in some other way. Key environmental agents will no longer be required to act against the perceived interests of the firms they work for, possibly at large cost to themselves. Instead, in the changed regulatory circumstances, the choice of the environmental option by a key agent is more likely to coincide with the pursuit of her other goals such as success in her career. Nor will she face the possibility that the choice of the environmental option will be a vain gesture because so few others will follow her lead. Moreover, while the electoralist version does, like the key environmental agents version, rely on an ethical change amongst individuals leading to changed behaviour, the costs and risks associated with the required behaviour (casting one's vote in the appropriate way) are likely to be much less than those associated with the behaviour required of a much smaller group of people in the key environmental agents version.⁷² By distributing the responsibility for solving environmental problems more widely, it lessens the burdens on each individual.

Nevertheless, despite these apparent advantages over the key environmental agents version, it does not follow that the electoralist version sets out an effective way of solving environmental problems. For it has not been shown that the proposed mechanism is sufficiently robust to resist the pressures against choosing the environmental option. There are at least two ways in which this pressure could undermine the electoralist solution. First, if the state proposes legislation that will force private firms and other agencies to choose the more costly environmental option it will come under significant pressure from those firms to weaken and dilute the regulation. Firms are likely to claim that their own viability is threatened. No doubt some of these threats will be spurious, but there is little reason to think that they all will be. Expensive environmental measures will eat into a firm's profitability. Most governments in liberal democracies accept

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

responsibility for the overall functioning of the economy and are likely to be sensitive to such threats. There will therefore be a tendency for them to make concessions for the sake of maintaining the viability of firms in a competitive market. Second, if the electorate are persuaded that environmental legislation will threaten jobs and prosperity they may become reluctant to endorse and act on an environmental ethic. This may be particularly so if the threats appear to be direct and immediate, while the benefits of environmental regulation, because of the mediated relationship with the environment, seem more distant.

It is not being argued here that the pervasive pressure to reduce costs demonstrates that both the electoralist and the key environmental agents solutions are unworkable. That is an empirical question and there is evidence that the electorate can be persuaded to go some way towards adopting environmental values and that modern states are able to impose some constraints on firms in order to achieve environmental ends. Rather, the point is that the ethicists themselves rarely acknowledge that there might be this sort of barrier to implementing ethicist solutions. Passmore, for example, having outlined the electoralist account simply remarks that the assumptions on which it is based 'are not, in a democracy, absurd'.⁷³ Taken literally, this might be true, but it is not the same as providing empirical support for the account in the light of potential objections to its feasibility. Unless this issue is addressed we do not have good reason to think that the ethicist solutions can work, and some grounds for remaining sceptical. While the advocates of both of the versions of the second ethicist claim go some way towards acknowledging the complexity of modern societies, they still see changes in individual attitudes towards the environment as constituting the crucial causal nexus. They ignore the possibility that systematic pressures generated within society could, directly or indirectly, undermine this approach to solving environmental problems.

6. CONCLUSION

Together, the two ethicist claims offer a simple account of the causes and solutions of environmental problems. What happens to the natural environment is, at root, a reflection of the general attitudes towards the environment held by individuals. If problems arise it is because people have ethically misguided attitudes towards the natural environment and problems are to be solved by getting people to appreciate the ethical significance of the natural world.

The criticisms made here of some specific versions of the ethicist claims suggest that this simple picture may not be true of modern, complex societies. It has been argued that the relationship between individuals and the natural environment is typically a highly mediated one. Although people are as dependent as they have ever been on that environment, in modern societies their needs and desires are often satisfied via complex socio-economic systems, spread over

vast geographical areas and involving many different agents. People are unlikely to feel as responsible for the environmental harm that occurs in the course of satisfying their desires and needs as they would if they were more directly involved in exploiting the environment. This mediation creates a disjunction between their attitudes to the environment and the consequences of their consumptive actions. Although environmental damage has occurred, it may not be because people have the wrong attitudes. Moreover, there are certain systematic features of modern market economies that cast doubt on the feasibility of ethicist solutions to environmental problems. In particular, the pressure to reduce costs frequently translates into a pressure against choosing to protect the environment.

This discussion has identified certain large, characteristic features of modern societies. But questions about the exact nature and significance of these features are empirical ones and in this article these issues have not been pursued far. Most notably, not very much has been said about the origins, nature and precise impact of the pressure to reduce costs. A more detailed examination would need to investigate these issues much more carefully. It would be necessary to address questions such as whether the opportunities to profit from environmental protection provide a significant counterweight to the pressures against choosing the environmental option, or whether the exploitation of such opportunities simply leads to the redistribution of environmental harm to other media, other communities or other countries. It follows from the empirical nature of the objections to the ethicist account that it is open to the ethicists to mount an empirically based defence of their view. And since only specific versions of their claims have been considered here, it is also open to them to develop other, less vulnerable versions.

Nevertheless, even if the precise weight of the criticisms advanced here remain in doubt, what has been established is that if the ethicists are to defend their claims about the causes and solutions of environmental problems in modern societies, they need to engage much more closely with empirical questions about the nature of such societies. In particular, they need to consider both the systematic pressure against environmental solutions and the underlying dynamics of the socio-economic systems that give rise to that pressure. As it is, they tend to proceed as if such pressures did not exist. They offer us a pared down vision of environmental problems that highlights individuals and their attitudes on the one hand, and the natural environment on the other. Much of the intervening social context is lost from view. The counter-claim here has been that the social systems in which people live, work and interact with the natural environment have a central importance in structuring those interactions. This is something that any account of causes and solutions must acknowledge.

A final point can be made about the value of philosophical work in environmental ethics. The preceding section suggested that environmental

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

ethics does not have a major contribution to make to the solution of environmental problems. This is not due to the abstract nature of environmental ethics and nor is it caused by the difficulties of communication between academic philosophers and others. It is because the solution of environmental problems may not rest on ethical change. Thus the type of ethical argument and discussion that is characteristic of environmental ethics and that could, perhaps, contribute to ethical change, has no obvious part to play. That does not mean that environmental ethics has no value. Only that whatever value it has does not lie in the heroic role that Callicott would assign to it.

NOTES

¹ I am using the term 'environmental philosopher' in a broad sense to include writers such as Aldo Leopold and Lynn White who were not professional philosophers.

² Leopold 1949/1989: 203.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 214–18.

⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 207 and 208–9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁷ White 1967.

⁸ 'both our technological and our scientific movements got their start, acquired their character, and achieved world dominance in the Middle Ages' (White 1967: 1204–5).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1206.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1206.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1207.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1206.

¹³ Passmore 1974, Chapter 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁷ See his remarks in *ibid.*, pp. 56 and 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 57. See p. 97 for similar remarks about solving conservation problems.

²³ See *Ibid.*, pp. 96–7.

²⁴ Attfield, 1991, p. 31.

²⁵ Attfield, 1991, p. 83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 209–10.

²⁹ Ferré and Hartel, 1994; Marietta and Embree, 1995; Light and Katz, 1996.

³⁰ Norton 1996: 111.

³¹ Callicott 1995:19.

³² Ibid., p. 30. As this indicates, Callicott would also seem to accept the first ethicist claim that general attitudes to nature play an important part in causing environmental problems.

³³ Ibid., p. 27. Even when (on p. 24) he expresses some doubts about whether it will be possible to convert enough people to this new worldview, his response is not to suggest that environmentalists should concentrate on persuading fewer people, but rather that they may have to work at generating changes *within* worldviews.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 31–2.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 33–4.

³⁶ Gunn 1994: 206.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 207.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 211 (emphasis added).

³⁹ Ibid., p. 211.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 212.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 213.

⁴² For example: 'It can also be pointed out that acting ethically is not just a matter of private behaviour change. At Peter Singer ... points out, the ethical vegetarian does not merely stop eating animal products; he or she should be endeavouring to create a movement, urging supermarkets and restaurants to cater to vegetarians, lobbying government, and so on.' Ibid., pp. 212–13.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 214.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 214.

⁴⁵ Hargrove 1989: 4.

⁴⁶ Hargrove 1993: 292.

⁴⁷ It should be acknowledged that there are some indications of a contrary view in Hargrove. In the same article as the one in which he advocates focusing on environmental professionals, he also writes that 'Without some sort of protomoral change at the intuitive level throughout human society, it would be impossible for an ethicist to articulate an acceptable view of any kind.' (Hargrove 1994: 249)

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 248.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 250.

⁵¹ I have suggested that the first claim is a claim about the role of *attitudes* in causing problems, and that the second claim is a claim about the role of a *change in attitudes* in bringing about solutions. It would be possible to reformulate the first claim as a claim about the causal effect of a change of attitudes. One could hold that the adoption of legitimating attitudes played an important part in bringing about environmental problems. The two claims would then have the same form. But in the context of the present discussion these different ways of formulating the claims are of little significance.

⁵² For example, he cites 'the belief that nature exists to serve us' as a causal factor responsible for current pollution problems (Passmore 1974: 71).

⁵³ White 1967: 1205.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 1206.

⁵⁵ Callicott 1995: 30.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁷ Attfield 1991: 8–17.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 8–9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 82.

THE ETHICIST CONCEPTION...

⁶¹ White 1967:1205.

⁶² I am granting that consumptive actions are a causally significant factor in bringing it about that producers exploit their environment in ways that damage that environment. This concession could be challenged. It could be argued that although past consumption plays a part in causing producers to produce in the future, it is not a significant factor in causing them to produce *in environmentally harmful ways*. However, this is not the line of criticism adopted here. Rather, I argue that even if the concession about the causal significance of consumptive actions is granted, we still have reason for doubting that legitimating attitudes contribute to the performance of those actions.

⁶³ Scheffler 1995.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁵ These first two points are a refinement of Scheffler's single point that a person's sense of responsibility is reduced when an outcome is the joint result of the actions of a number of people. I am arguing that there are (at least) two different ways in which outcomes can be the joint result of the actions of a number of people and each, on its own, can contribute to a weakened sense of responsibility.

⁶⁶ Derek Parfit is also interested in the way in which, in modern societies, a person often produces significant effects only in combination with many others (Parfit, 1984, Part One). But Parfit's general concern is different from mine. He wants to elaborate the correct criterion of right action in these new, complex circumstances, a criterion that might involve revisions to our common-sense morality. My concern, following Scheffler, is to suggest how these complexities may undermine a sense of responsibility, at least in the environmental sphere. If this line of argument is sound, and could be generalised, it might cast doubt on the viability of Parfit's proposed revisions. Atfield also argues for a wider sense of responsibility (Atfield, 1987, Chapters 6–8) and some environmental groups appear to do the same. But again, what is at issue is the feasibility of this project.

⁶⁷ The point that environmental harm may be dispersed – as distinct from spatially distant – and that this will lessen a person's sense of responsibility, is not a point made by Scheffler.

⁶⁸ Scheffler suggests that ignorance, rather than being a distinct cause of a weakened sense of responsibility actually offers the explanation of why spatial and temporal distance will have that effect (*Ibid.*, p. 228). In contrast I have assumed that spatial distance will itself reduce one's sense of responsibility, even if one has full knowledge of the consequences and how one's actions produced it. But the difference between my position and Scheffler's is, perhaps, a fine one, and not easy to adjudicate.

⁶⁹ This is a large empirical claim and there are counter-instances. Civil nuclear power would seem to be both more costly and more environmentally damaging than the alternatives. Nevertheless, all that is suggested here is that in most cases the environmental option is the more costly. The role of empirical claims in this argument is discussed briefly in the final section of the article. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

⁷⁰ The use of the feminine gender here is not intended to imply that all key environmental agents are women, just as the use of the masculine gender in the previous section was not intended to imply that all consumers are men.

⁷¹ Of course, if there are cases where the environmental option is cheaper then it is likely to be adopted. But in these cases it is the pressure to reduce costs that itself favours that option and there will be no need for an ethical change on the part of key environmental

agents. Substantial argument is needed to show that the situation is such that a change of values is both achievable and will play an important part in solving the problem.

⁷² There are arguments that point in the other direction. As was seen earlier, when Leopold advocates solving problems through the education of landowners, he contrasts this favourably with passing responsibility to the government. His view is that the tasks of conservation are 'too large, too complex or too widely dispersed to be performed by government.' (Leopold 1949/1989: 214).

⁷³ Passmore 1974: 97.

REFERENCES

- Attfield, Robin 1987. *A Theory of Value and Obligation*. London, New York and Sydney: Croom Helm.
- Attfield, Robin 1991. *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (2nd edn). Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Callicott, J. Baird 1995. 'Environmental Philosophy is Environmental Activism: The Most Radical and Effective Kind', in D.E. Marietta Jr. and L. Embree (eds) *Environmental Philosophy and Environmental Activism*, pp. 19–35. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Ferré, F and Hartel P. (eds) 1994. *Ethics and Environmental Policy*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Gunn, Alastair S. 1994. 'Can Environmental Ethics Save the World?', in F. Ferré and P. Hartel (eds) *Ethics and Environmental Policy*, pp. 195–216. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Hargrove, Eugene 1989. 'Beginning the Next Decade: Taking Stock', *Environmental Ethics* 11: 3–4.
- Hargrove, Eugene 1993. 'After Fifteen Years', *Environmental Ethics* 15: 291–2.
- Hargrove, Eugene 1994. 'Urging Environmentalists to Become Philosophical', in F. Ferré, and P. Hartel (eds) *Ethics and Environmental Policy*, pp. 241–52. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Leopold, Aldo 1949/1989. *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Light A. and Katz E. (eds) 1996. *Environmental Pragmatism*. London: Routledge.
- Marietta Jr.D.E. and Embree L., (eds) 1995. *Environmental Philosophy and Environmental Activism*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Norton, Bryan 1996. 'Integration or Reduction: Two Approaches to Environmental Values', in A. Light and E. Katz (eds) *Environmental Pragmatism*, pp.105-138. London: Routledge.
- Parfit, Derek 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Passmore, John 1974. *Man's Responsibility for Nature*. London: Duckworth.
- Scheffler, Samuel 1995. 'Individual Responsibility in a Global Age', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 12(1): 219–36.
- White, Lynn 1967. 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155: 1203–7.

[33]

Can environmental ethics make a difference?

Robin Attfield

We now consider a different challenge, confronting most if not all forms of normative environmental ethics. It has been suggested by Barnabas Dickson that environmental ethics has and can have little or no impact on practice, whether at the level of public policy, of business decisions, or of consumer choice. Proponents of

76 Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics

environmental ethics ('ethicists') pay insufficient attention to the socio-economic context in which environmental problems arise and are tackled. The context in which action takes place in contemporary developed societies diminishes almost to vanishing point the influence of ethical principles and attitudes, or so Dickson suggests.²⁶ So we need to consider whether environmental ethics is (as David Hume famously suggested once of reason in general) inert in matters of practice, or (as Hume's critics have maintained about reason) capable of making a difference.²⁷ Dickson's claims, however, embody a specific basis of which (unlike Hume's) a discussion here is necessary and appropriate.

Dickson begins by identifying and criticizing two assumptions or claims which he ascribes to a number of ethicists, including Leopold, White, Passmore and myself. The first such assumption is that certain general attitudes to nature play an important role in the causation of problems; these attitudes, which purportedly legitimate the heedless exploitation of nature, are dubbed 'legitimizing attitudes'. While ethicists disagree about which these attitudes are, they agree that people's attitudes have a significant causal role. (A preliminary discussion of the role of beliefs and attitudes in generating environmental problems has already been presented in chapter 1.) The second assumption is that 'bringing it about that people adopt environmentally benign attitudes will play an important part in realising solutions'.²⁸ Besides the ethicists mentioned already, this assumption is also ascribed to J. Baird Callicott, Alastair Gunn and Eugene C. Hargrove. Once again, Dickson recognizes that these and other ethicists differ about which attitudes are benign, but finds them united about the key role of attitudes in solving environmental problems.²⁹

Dickson's criticism of the first ethicist claim, in so far as it relates to the present and not only to the past, is that it pays insufficient attention to the social context of modern societies. For in modern societies most people are not directly involved in many of the interactions with the natural environment on which they depend. At most they will be involved in a few, and will often have little influence on these interactions.³⁰ (Must there not therefore be some individuals, such as company directors and leading bankers and cabinet ministers, who have a large influence on production, and others who jointly, through their work or potentially through industrial action, have a significant influence? Dickson seems later to recognize this,³¹ but writes here as if the arguably significant attitudes of these producers can be disregarded.) Rather, most people consume the products of these interactions, and it is by consuming that they provide a signal to producers that consumer demand can

Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics 77

be expected to continue. Hence the first ethicist claim should be understood as holding that legitimating attitudes have their effect by causing consumption that in turn causes producers to continue producing in environmentally harmful ways. (Should it not also be understood as concerning people's influence as voters, as Dickson later acknowledges,³² and also as participants in campaigns, as signers of petitions, as suburban gardeners, as senders of e-mails, as shareholders, and as participants in pension-funds?) But this highly **mediated** (that is, indirect or distanced) relation between individual consumption and harmful consequences means that individuals are unlikely to see themselves as responsible for these consequences.³³

Dickson goes on to suggest that in modern society the mediated relation between individuals and the natural environment considerably reduces people's sense of responsibility for their consumptive actions. Thus individual people interact with the environment indirectly (through other agents), as one among many other consumers, at a spatial distance, with spatially dispersed consequences, and in ways of which they are largely unaware; and all these aspects weaken the sense of responsibility that they might have felt for direct, unshared impacts on visible neighbours in their immediate vicinity.³⁴ Consumers of coffee (to borrow and develop Dickson's own example)³⁵ produce impacts on coffee production only indirectly, alongside other consumers, and on plantations and producers in several distant countries, of whom they can know little. If the producers are exploited, or competition undermines their earnings, or cash-crop production destroys rainforests, or reduces food for local consumption, or raises prices for such food, or even contributes to famine, the consumers are unlikely to feel responsible, even if such possible impacts ever come to light at all. The world economic system is perennially liable to have such effects, and consumers can scarcely be blamed for their participation. But I return to the consumption of coffee below.

Dickson's claim, however, concerns what people *feel* about responsibility (he actually says it concerns the '**phenomenology** of action', and thus agents' perceptions of their actions and responsibilities), rather than about responsibility itself. In a revealing chapter, Jonathan Glover has discussed the phenomenon of 'moral distancing' as a defence mechanism enabling people to inflict pain and suffering at a distance, and discusses as a case in point the doctrine of acts and omissions, according to which agents are less responsible for the foreseeable consequences of their omissions than for exactly similar foreseeable consequences of their actions.³⁶ Dickson too alludes to this doctrine, once again in explicating the

78 Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics

feelings of modern consumers,³⁷ but if, as Glover argues and as I have argued elsewhere³⁸ and at p. 51, this doctrine is an illusion, then the issue has to be reopened of whether any of the kinds of mediated relation between action and consequences genuinely affect responsibility itself, rather than perceptions of responsibility. For example, no one could seriously defend the claim that spatial distance and spatial diffusion either make causal outcomes less genuine or exonerate agents of causing them.

Yet the issue is supposed to be the causal responsibility of individuals and their attitudes for environmental problems through their acts of consumption, and to this issue consumers' lack of sense of responsibility makes no difference. Even indirect consequences remain consequences, and when they are foreseeable (as when ill-timed official announcements predictably inaugurate an economic slump) we may even be morally responsible for them. Further, as Derek Parfit has argued, in modern society many actions, each of which has only a small or even an imperceptible effect, can jointly have serious foreseeable outcomes, responsibility for which is shared by all the individual agents concerned.³⁹ But importantly, the issue is not whether or in what degree they are morally responsible. If it were so, then the fact that they could not possibly be aware of all the distant and diffused side-effects of their actions (let alone omissions) would be highly relevant, for this fact makes many of these outcomes unforeseeable, and therefore not ones for which the agents could be held morally responsible or blamed. (Yet when campaigning organizations, like those mentioned below, bring these outcomes to light and publicize what they discover, agents can no longer claim exoneration simply by appealing to ignorance, once that ignorance is no longer beyond their control.) Since the issue is causal responsibility, the agents' ignorance is beside the point. Besides, it cannot be replied that this ignorance is relevant on the basis that in its absence these consumers would act differently. For this reply would concede that the beliefs and attitudes of consumers make a significant causal difference, which is the point at issue.

Can values contribute to change?

The second ethicist assumption is that 'bringing it about that people adopt environmentally benign attitudes will play an important part in realising solutions'.⁴⁰ According to one version, a small group of decision-makers are to be persuaded to adopt these attitudes. One objection is said to be that the 'small group' is hard to identify,

Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics 79

but this is not a serious objection at all. The real objection is that the context of managers' decisions in modern economies includes pervasive pressure to keep costs down; failure to do this puts profits and sometimes one's job at risk. Hence even managers with the right attitudes will often be unable to adopt environmentally benign solutions. Supposedly, the ethicist 'remedy' would only work if this systematic and powerful pressure were absent.⁴¹

But this verdict treats the ethicist case as suggesting that environmentally benign attitudes are a sufficient condition of realizing solutions (which may be why the second ethicist assumption is re-expressed as the claim that 'the solution of environmental problems rests on the adoption of a more ethical orientation towards the environment').⁴² Dickson well shows the falsity of any view that makes attitudes a sufficient condition of solutions, but it is not clear that any philosopher has held such a view, although the quotations from Callicott suggest that he comes close to this position.⁴³ The adoption of environmentally benign principles and beliefs could still (in theory) be a necessary condition of solutions, or more plausibly a condition necessary in some situations (and thus part of a necessary condition). Solutions might well be impossible if no one were trying to reach them, and if no one were trying to reach them (broadly) on the basis of the right sort of attitudes or policies, if not of basic principles. Beliefs and attitudes could thus interact with material economic forces in influencing events, as was claimed in chapter 1, and as I shall shortly illustrate.

Dickson's point about pervasive pressures also shows that environmentalists' efforts to convert corporate decision-makers to their policies are constantly beset with difficulty, but this is hardly news to campaigning environmentalists. Fortunately it is not the whole story either. For consumer pressure in the market place often obliges corporations to adopt environmentalist policies out of self-interest, just as threats of exposure by pressure groups can have a similar effect, quite apart from the effects of governmental regulation. Indeed corporate decision-makers are newly acknowledging awareness of ethical pressures from consumers, and a good proportion of institutional investors in the UK and the USA, such as USS (Universities Superannuation Scheme) are adopting, under pressure from their members, the practice of '**Socially Responsible Investment**'. This practice involves efforts to induce the corporations in which these investors invest to adopt (for the sake of their reputations and with a view to retention of market confidence) a stance of corporate social responsibility, not least with regard to their environmental impacts.⁴⁴ There are also occasions when developments in green technology give rise to new opportunities for creative

80 Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics

initiatives, generating entire new industries concerned with recycling or pollution-abatement or renewable energy generation. Besides, awareness of environmentalist opinion sometimes supplies a tie-breaker between benign and more harmful policies. Sometimes these decisions cause new problems in other communities or other countries, a possibility of which Dickson warns.⁴⁵ But the partial and ambiguous nature of some solutions does not indicate that environmental activism is bound to fail, or that it cannot exercise significant influence.

According to the other version of the second ethicist assumption considered and criticized by Dickson, attitudes of the electorate in a democracy can inaugurate state policies, taxes and regulation of an environmentally benign variety,⁴⁶ and can thus contribute to desirable solutions. This approach recognizes the scale of the task for campaigners, and the need to tackle the framework in which corporations operate, and also circumvents the problem (supposedly faced by the other version) of requiring possible self-sacrifice on the part of key environmental agents. However, the economic pressures against choosing environmentalist options will be strong and pervasive, both from firms that stand to lose money, and from workers and unions fearing loss of jobs. Electorates may be persuaded that environmental policies would spell a downturn in the economy, particularly if the threats are 'direct and immediate', while 'because of the mediated relationship with the environment' the benefits 'seem more distant'.⁴⁷ Here, then, Dickson succeeds in showing the potential relevance of mediated impacts. Yet the other side of the same coin is the potential relevance of disclosures from campaigners and campaigning journalists of the reality of these impacts, however mediated; large numbers of consumers and of voters could be swayed in either direction. While it must be granted that the economic system generates huge problems for environmental campaigners, no one has shown that these problems are insuperable, and indeed Dickson eventually acknowledges that 'there is evidence that the electorate can be persuaded to go some way towards adopting environmental values' and modern states to introduce related policies and constraints.⁴⁸

Dickson does not ultimately claim that either of the two versions of the second ethicist assumption or claim is untrue or unworkable, but suggests that ethicists are in error through representing changes in individual attitudes as crucial, and ignoring systematic pressures which could in practice undermine either or both of the versions of the second 'assumption'.⁴⁹ (He is probably right here, at any rate about some ethicists. Others, however, have attempted to take systematic and structural factors fully into account.)⁵⁰ However,

Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics 81

the admitted viability of this assumption suggests that there is nothing intrinsically objectionable about holding it, and nothing objectionable at all as long as the problems and pressures are recognized. Similarly, if attitudes can play this role in solutions, it would be surprising if they cannot play any part in the generation of problems, although the second ethicist claim could in theory be held in the absence of the first.⁵¹ For all that Dickson seeks to argue to the contrary, the claim that certain general attitudes to nature play an important role in the causation of environmental problems remains tenable, as long as their 'important role' is understood to be generally that of part of a necessary condition for the incidence of these problems (as was also suggested above in connection with solutions), rather than that of singly necessary or singly sufficient conditions. (While there is, as Dickson suggests,⁵² an empirical or verifiably factual component to this claim, its core, with regard to the strength of the relation claimed between attitudes and environmental problems in particular, is defensible on an *a priori* or non-empirical basis. For no empirical basis is required for the claim that actions are typically explicable through beliefs and attitudes, or for the claim that all actions have causal impacts of some kind on the world. Granted also that environmental problems are problems arising from human interactions with the natural environment, there will have to be some human actions, and related beliefs and attitudes, that give rise to any such problem.)

One of Dickson's conclusions is that 'environmental ethics does not have a contribution to make to the solution of environmental problems'. This is 'because the solution of environmental problems may not rest on ethical change' (to which environmental ethics might have contributed).⁵³ Dickson is right if, by 'rest on ethical change' he means 'be secured by ethical change' (as a sufficient condition). But to show that normative environmental ethics has no contribution to make to environmental solutions, he would need to show that environmental ethics can make no difference at all (not even as part of a necessary condition), perhaps because economic structures determine everything. But he does not show any of this.

Besides, through conceding that both versions of the second ethicist claim may be workable, he has effectively conceded, to contrary effect, that the attitudes on which normative environmental ethics might be expected to exercise an influence really can make a contribution to the solution of environmental problems, both through the decisions of key decision-makers in corporations, labour unions and banks and through the decisions of governments and civil servants as influenced by the attitudes of electorates.

82 Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics, then, is not destined to be inert outside academic institutions. Furthermore, the examples cited are not the only routes through which beliefs and attitudes can prove significant. But I cannot say more here about routes such as the lobbying of pension funds, or even the crucially important route of environmental education.

To turn away briefly from high theory and corporate decision-making, we can now return to the example of purchasing and consuming coffee. For, besides key decision-makers, governments, and their electorates, consumers too are capable of taking into account the outcomes of consumption, however mediated, and acting accordingly. The workers on tea and coffee plantations in India, Sri Lanka and East Africa frequently receive very poor wages and live in squalid conditions, all of which are in some ways the mediated (indirect, distant, diffused, cumulative and/or inaccessible) consequences of consumer decisions and of the related economic structures. This information, however, has been publicized by NGOs such as Christian Aid and Traidcraft, which have also established cooperatives whose workers receive a fair reward for their work, funded by consumers in developed countries who purchase fairly traded tea and coffee at above-market prices.

Such consumers, in conjunction with Oxfam, CAFOD and Friends of the Earth, have also formed the International Federation for Alternative Trade and the Trade Justice Movement to promote fairly traded commodities and related campaigning. Fairly traded tea and coffee (and other commodities too) are available for purchase in a widening range of outlets in Britain, Canada, Switzerland, the United States and other developed countries, and this gives consumers concerned about the global impact of consumption opportunities to contribute to **fair trade**, and also to enhanced environmental health for the producers. Sales of fairly traded coffee have increased annually from the mid-1990s, and in 2001, according to Reuters News Service, were approaching 1 per cent of world sales. While no one expects these efforts to overthrow the world system of production, many consumers have taken up these opportunities and have thereby given many producers their only hope for the future.

Furthermore, NGOs have campaigned to ameliorate environmental impacts and to enhance conditions of production in many other cases. Thus the World Development Movement managed to persuade Del Monte to allow independent trade unions in its banana plantations in Central America, and has been lobbying other large banana companies to curtail the aerial spraying of their plantations with herbicides and pesticides. Compassion in World Farming has

Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics 83

successfully campaigned for a Europe-wide ban on the rearing of chickens in battery cages, and is seeking to ban the export trade in live animals across the European Union, and in Britain to replace slaughter with vaccination as government policy for combating foot-and-mouth disease. Animal-welfare and environmental NGOs have persuaded the countries of the International Commission on Whaling to ban commercial whaling, and are putting pressure on companies that fish for tuna to use methods that avoid harm to dolphins. Friends of the Earth and human rights campaigners, having secured widespread public support, recently persuaded the construction company Balfour Beatty to withdraw from building the Ilisu Dam that (among other environmental impacts) would have flooded an ancient Kurdish town in eastern Turkey and deprived Syria and Iraq of vital water supplies.

Nor are these cases isolated. Pressure groups are often able to enlist consumer opinion to address the outcomes of consumer choice, however indirect, distant, diffused, cumulative and/or inaccessible. They reasonably assume (just as consequentialists do) that we have responsibility, as agents, for foreseeable impacts that we cause to happen, however unintentionally, and also for foreseeable outcomes that we allow to happen by default. They further assume that consumers have no desire to generate suffering or environmental harm in any of these ways, and that the related moral responsibility can be constructively exercised to solve problems both of environmental degradation and of injustice. While consumers cannot tackle all the interactions with nature related to their consumption, yet in an ever-expanding range of cases precisely this task can often be undertaken. In these cases, consumer indifference can reasonably be held after all to be perpetuating the problems (as the first ethicist claim suggests), and consumer participation can contribute crucially to solutions (as the second claim can now be construed as suggesting).

Campaigning of this kind can even make an impact on economic structures. Thus the Jubilee 2000 Campaign to secure the cancellation of developing countries' unrepayable debt seems actually to have proved crucial in persuading several countries to renounce bilateral debt of this kind, and even to achieve some amount of debt alleviation on the part of multilateral bodies like the World Bank. In the most spectacular event of this 'Drop the Debt' Campaign, 100,000 people surrounded the English city of Birmingham during the G8 Summit held there in 1998. This campaign was as relevant to environmental as to developmental issues, for the need to service debts has frequently induced indebted countries to cut down their forests to fund interest payments. Relatedly, Susan

84 Some Critiques of Environmental Ethics

George has demonstrated a strong correlation between indebtedness and large-scale deforestation.⁵⁴

While current international schemes for debt alleviation are admittedly inadequate, they are much less inadequate than the system that was in place before the Jubilee 2000 Campaign began. Thus lobbying about the terms of international trade cannot reasonably be discredited as a mere ploy to salve people's consciences as consumers and beneficiaries of that trade. It reflects the application of ethical principles both to the circumstances and to the structures of production, in which most interactions with nature take place. In doing this, it takes structural issues and their far-reaching implications seriously, and at the same time (fortunately) does not despair about whether the application of values can contribute to change. To assume that **normative ethics** can make no difference would involve forgoing in future many gains to nature and to humanity achieved by campaigning NGOs, of which only a few from the last five years have been cited here.

Readers are invited to form a view on whether psychological distance limits responsibility, and whether the application of ethics can generate significant change. Supply examples (for or against this possibility) of your own.

NOTES, EXPANDED WITH FULLER REFERENCES

26. Barnabas Dickson, 'The Ethicist Conception of Environmental Problems', *Environmental Values*, 9 (2000), pp. 127-152 (also available online from Ingenta Journals and Bioline).
27. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969), II.III.III. Relevant criticisms of Hume can be found in Julius Kovesi, *Moral Notions*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1967), M.F. Cohen, 'The Practicality of Moral Reasoning', *Mind*, 78 (1969), pp. 534-549, and in Renford Bambrough, *Moral Scepticism and Moral Knowledge*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and Henley, 1979).
28. Dickson, 'The Ethicist Conception', p. 132.
29. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 135.
30. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 138.
31. Dickson, *ibid.*, pp. 143-145.
32. Dickson, *ibid.*, pp. 145-147.

NOTES, EXPANDED WITH FULLER REFERENCES

33. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 139.
34. Dickson, *ibid.*, pp. 139-142.
35. Dickson, *ibid.*, pp. 140-141.
36. Jonathan Glover, 'Moral Distance', ch. 20 of his *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, (Penguin, Harmondsworth and New York, 1977), pp. 286-297.
37. Dickson, 'The Ethicist Conception', p. 140.
38. Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, pp. 92-102; Attfield, *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics*, (Éditions Rodopi, Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, 1995), pp. 117-128. See also Attfield, *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century* (Polity Press, Cambridge, and Blackwell, Malden, MA, 2003), Chapter Two.
39. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), pp. 70-86.
40. Dickson, 'The Ethicist Conception', p. 132.
41. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 145.
42. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 143.
43. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 133. Dickson is quoting from J. Baird Callicott, 'Environmental Philosophy is Environmental Activism: The Most Radical and Effective Kind', in Don Marietta Jr. and Lester Embree (eds), *Environmental Philosophy and Environmental Activism* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1995), pp. 19-35.
44. Peter Moon and Raj Thamotheram, 'Corporations Become Socially Responsible: Businesses around the World are Acting on the Growing Backlash against Global Capitalism', *The Independent* (12 December 2000). See also the six contributions on 'Ethics and Corporate Responsibility' in Rosamund M. Thomas (ed.), *Teaching Ethics, Volume Three, Environmental Ethics*, (HMSO and Ethics International Press, Cambridge, 1996).
45. Dickson, 'The Ethicist Conception', p. 148
46. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 146.
47. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 147.
48. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 147.
49. Dickson, *ibid.*, p. 147.
50. See Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford and Columbia University Press, New York 1983), p. 17; *Environmental Philosophy: Principles and*

NOTES, EXPANDED WITH FULLER REFERENCES

Prospects, (Ashgate, Aldershot and Brookfield, VT, 1994), pp. 221-235; and 'Environmental Ethics, Overview', in Ruth Chadwick (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics* (4 vols. Academic Press, San Diego, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 73-81, where I wrote, at p. 79: 'The problems have to be understood against the background of the current inequitable international economic order, and are unlikely to be solved unless this order is radically restructured. Ethical theories in which all this is neglected are likely to prove transitory.'

51. Dickson, 'The Ethicist Conception', pp. 135f.
52. Dickson, *ibid.*, pp. 128, 147, and 148.
53. Dickson, *ibid.*, pp. 148-149.
54. Susan George, *The Debt Boomerang: How Third World Debt Harms Us All* (Pluto Press, London, 1992), p. 10.

Name Index

- Abbey, Edward 136–37
Agar, Nicholas xxii, 312
Aiken, William 562
Anderson, Elizabeth 66
Aristotle, 50, 119, 359, 379, 381, 409
Attfield, Robin xv–xxx, 41–58, 581, 583, 584,
588, 589, 605–16
Aquinas, Thomas 196, 525
- Bahro, Rudolf 188
Barkley, P.W. 6
Beardsley, Monroe 50
Benhabib, Seyla 195, 196, 199, 209
Benjamin, Jessica 209
Benson, John xxiv
Berry, Wendell 190
Blacktooth, Cecilia 206
Blum, Lawrence A. 195, 197, 199
Bohr, Niels 43
Bookchin, Murray 545
Boulding, Kenneth 447
Brennan, Andrew 544, 545
Brentano, Franz 66
Brink, David O. 53
Brundtland, Gro Harlem xxvi, xxx
- Callicott, J. Baird xvi, xviii, xix, xxii, xxiv, 31,
32, 38, 41–43, 121–32, 133–57, 161–70,
173–76, 214, 310, 346, 350, 585, 587,
601, 606, 609
Carson, Rachel 70
Carter, Alan xviii, xx, xxvii–xxviii, 543–64,
565–77
Carter, Edgar Robert 51
Cather, Willa 70
Cheney, Jim 194
Chodorow, Nancy 209
Cohen, Joshua 503
Cohen, Michael 185
Colwell, Thomas B. Jr 17, 18
Comstock, Gary 297
Cook, Francis 199
Cooper, David E. xxiv
- Corcoran, John 88
Cornell, Drucilla 209
- Dahl, A. 566
Darrow, Clarence 27
Davis, Margaret 309
Darwin, Charles 27–29, 123–24, 130, 150, 162,
163, 167
Delattre, Edwin 435
Descartes, 44, 47
De-Shalit, Avner 569
Devall, Bill 190
Dewey, John 48, 436, 437
Dickens, Charles 69
Dickson, Barnabas xxviii, 579–604, 605–7,
609–11
Dobson, Andrew xxvii, 499, 500, 501, 503–7,
517, 518, 565–75 *passim*
Domsky, Darren xviii, 161–78
Donne, John 434
Driver, Julia 370
Dryzek, John 503
Dubos, René 23
Duncan, David James 70
Durning, Alan 380
- Eckersley, Robyn 212
Ehrlich, Paul 17
Ekeli, Kristian Skagen xxvii, 499–520
Elliot, Robert 46, 79, 80, 83, 84
Elster, Jon 513, 516
Elton, Charles 150
- Feinberg, Joel 235–44
Fishkin, James 569–71
Foot, Philippa xvii, 84–86
Fowles, John 70
Fox, Warwick 73, 202–5, 211–12
Frankena, William 235, 238–40, 252
Freeman, P. 478
Fromm, Erich 442, 443
- Galbraith, J.K. 190

- Gandhi, Mahatma 180, 184
 George, Susan 554, 557, 613–14
 Gewirth, Alan 557, 558
 Gilligan, Carol 195, 199, 209, 210
 Golding, M.P. 391, 392, 396, 407
 Goodhall, Jane 225
 Goodin, Robin 500, 511, 516, 517, 518
 Goodland, Robert 561
 Goodpaster, Kenneth E. xx–xxii, 231–48, 263, 285
 Gore, Al 479, 502
 Grahame, Kenneth 130
 Griffin, James 201
 Grimshaw, Jean 203, 204, 209
 Griscom, Joan L. 201
 Guha, Ramachandra xviii, 179–91
 Gunn, Alastair 585–88, 595, 597
 Gutmann, Amy 503
- Habermas, Jürgen 503
 Hardin, Garrett xxvii, 16, 17, 545–52 *passim*, 554–59 *passim*, 562, 563, 564,
 Hare, R.M. 231, 235
 Hargrove, Eugene 49, 586–88, 595, 597
 Hart, H.L.A. 10
 Hausmann, P. 478
 Hays, Samuel 186
 Hefner, Hugh 445
 Heilbroner, Robert L. 433
 Hill, Thomas E. Jr xv, xxi, xxiii, xxiv, xxv, 319–32, 380
 Hillel, Daniel 535
 Hoagland, Edward 80
 Hobbes, Thomas 95, 446, 487
 Holland, Alan xvii, 79–95
 Hughes, Howard 446
 Hume, David xvi, 50, 121–33 *passim*, 161–63, 233, 606
 Huntley, Brian 530
 Hurka, T. 86
 Huxley, Aldous 181
- Inden, Ronald 185
- Jaggar, Alison 201
 James, William 88
 Jamieson, Dale xxv, xxvi, xxvii, 71, 74, 359–82, 467–98
 Jeffers, Robinson 111, 434
 Johnson, Laurence 312
- Jones, Hardy 436
 Josephson, Eric 440, 441
 Josephson, Mary 440, 441
- Kant, Immanuel 44, 67, 123, 127, 222, 231, 258, 276, 360, 398, 455, 526, 572
 Kaufman, Frederik xxii
 Kafka, G. 501, 502
 Kenniston, Kenneth 442
 Kernberg, Otto 443
 Khayyam, Omar 326
 Kim, Jaegwon 53
 King, Ynestra 201
 Korsgaard, Christine 360, 363
 Krieger, Martin 278
- Lasch, Christopher 443
 Laslett, Peter 569–71
 Ledec, George 561
 Lee, Keekok xxiii
 Leopold, Aldo xvii, xviii, xxiv, 3, 4, 11, 19, 20, 23, 26, 29, 31, 70, 71, 99–113, 121–24 *passim*, 128–31 *passim*, 134, 135, 138–40 *passim*, 142, 143, 146, 150, 161, 162, 163, 166, 170, 181, 196, 231, 248, 308, 544, 581, 583, 584, 586, 588, 595, 606
 Light, Andrew 59, 62
 Lippman, Walter 187
 Livingstone, John 204
 Lloyd, Genevieve 195, 201, 207
 Lo, Y.S. xvi, xviii, 133–60
 Locke, John 47, 512
 Lopez, Barry 70
- McCracken, S. 403
 McHarg, Ian 13
 Mackie, John L. xvii, 87
 McLuhan, T.C. 206
 McShane, Katie xvii, 59–77
 Manin, Bernard 503
 Marietta, Don E. Jr 122
 Martin, L. 478
 Mead, Herbert 436, 437
 Mechler, R. 478
 Midgley, Mary xix, 198, 219–27
 Mill, John Stuart 83, 84, 89, 90, 198, 222, 292, 320, 340, 368
 Moore, G.E. xxiv, 45, 65, 124–25, 292–93, 322, 398
 Morito, Bruce 59–60, 72

- Muir, John 70, 180, 181, 185, 444
- Naess, Arne xv, xvii, xviii, xx, 80, 115–32, 180, 204, 302
- Nagel, Thomas 555, 564
- Narveson, 571
- Nash, Roderick 187
- Neidjie, Bill 199, 211
- Nicholson, Linda 197
- Nielsen, Kai 446
- Norton, Bryan G. xxiv, xxv, xxvii, 41, 42, 46–48, 59, 61, 62, 75, 333–50, 585
- O'Neill, John xxiv, 43
- Paehlke, Robert 502
- Parfit, Derek xxiv, xxvi, 244, 342, 345, 369, 514, 608
- Partridge, Ernest xxvi, 433–50, 514
- Passmore, John xv, xxi, xxvi, 4, 234, 240, 391, 395–401 *passim*, 407, 418, 419, 422, 437, 581–84 *passim*, 588, 599, 606
- Pinchot, Gifford 180
- Plato, 135
- Plumwood, Val (*previously Routley*) xix, xxvi, 193–217
- Poole, Ross 196, 209
- Pope, Carl 70
- Rawls, John 213, 255, 396, 398, 401, 418–85 *passim*, 503, 507, 572, 573, 574
- Redclift, Michael 563
- Regan, Tom xviii, xix, xx, xxi, xxiii, 65, 122, 138, 162, 194, 197, 198, 271–86, 338–40
- Rodman, John 200, 546
- Rolston, Holmes III xv, xvi, xxiv, xxvii, xxviii, 13–29, 41, 47, 61, 79, 122, 523–42, 543, 563
- Roshi, Robert Aitken 184
- Ross, W.D. 236
- Routley, Richard (*previously Sylvan*) xv, xvi, xviii, xxii, xxvi, 3–12, 175, 385–431, 436
- Routley, Val (*later Plumwood*) xix, xxvi, 385–431, 436
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford 201
- Russell, Bertrand 50
- Sagoff, Mark xxi, 278–283 *passim*
- Sale, Kirkpatrick 179, 180
- Santayana, George 181, 437
- Scheffler, Samuel 591
- Scherer, Donald xx, xxii, xxv, 31–40
- Schneider, N. 468
- Schumpeter, Joseph 566
- Schwartz, Thomas 571
- Schweitzer, Albert xx, 285, 288, 289, 294, 296–98 *passim*
- Scriven, Michael 446
- Searle, John 47
- Sears, Paul 15
- Seckler, D.W. 6
- Seed, John 202–3
- Sen, Amartya 559, 560
- Sessions, George 190
- Shepard, Paul 24, 25, 26
- Shrader-Frechette, Kristin 146
- Shue, Henry xxvi, 451–65
- Sidgwick, Henry 292, 293, 396, 398, 399, 400
- Siegfried, Roy 530
- Singer, Peter xviii, xix, xx, 151, 153–56, 227, 316, 339–41, 495, 546, 556
- Slote, Michael 554
- Smith, Adam 461
- Smith, Michael 54
- Snyder, Gary 183, 184
- Stegner, Wallace 71
- Stein, T. 502
- Sterba, James P. 301–16
- Stone, Christopher 232, 247, 546
- Sumner, L.W. 272
- Sunter, Clem 530
- Sylvan, Richard (*formerly Routley*) xv, xvi, xviii, xxvi, 3–12, 175, 385–431, 436
- Taliaferro, Charles xvii
- Taylor, Paul xix, xx, xxi, xxii, xxiii, 194, 195, 199, 249–70, 288–89, 296, 302, 311
- Thompson, Dennis 503
- Thompson, Janna xxii
- Thoreau, Henry David 181, 338, 339, 444
- Tzu, Lao 184, 185
- Urbinati, Nadia 511
- Varner, Gary xxii, 144, 287–99, 312
- Warnock, G.J. 231, 234, 237–41, 244
- Warren, Karen 205–10, 293, 501, 502
- Warren, V. 501

- Watson, Richard 80
Webster, 50
Wentz, P.S. 146, 569
Weston, Anthony 50, 59–60, 73, 75
White, Lynn xv, 581, 582, 583, 584, 589
Whitney, Elspeth xvi, xxviii
Wiggins, David xxv
Williams, Bernard xxiv, xxv, 294, 351–58
Wilson, Edward O. 123
Wittgenstein, Ludwig 21
Wong, David 46
Worster, Donald 309