

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY CSPH7010

LECTURE ONE

INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS EMERGENCE

Introduction

In the 1970's there was an increasing awareness of the environmental impacts of pollution, technology, industry, the use of pesticides and herbicides, and population growth. Contributing to such awareness was the publication of two widely read books. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (published in 1962) made people aware of the unintended harms caused by the use of pesticides and herbicides, while Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* made readers aware of the problems caused by overpopulation, including problems to do with our overuse of natural resources (see Attfield, 2003, p.37; and Cochrane 2007). Both these books suggested that human beings needed to re-examine their relationship with the nonhuman world.

Indeed, it was during the 1970's that the environmental movement raised a host of issues that many philosophers could not ignore, and philosophers concerned about environmental problems raised basic questions about humanity's relationship with nature. Such questions included:

- Are humans the only valuable beings on the planet?
- Does the natural world have its own worth, independent of the use it has for humans?
- Do humans have obligations to nonhuman beings? Do we have obligations to sentient beings only, or do our obligations extend to nonsentient things (such as trees, plants and ecosystems)?
- Do we have obligations to future beings?
- What are the ethical issues arising from problems to do with overpopulation and how should we best tackle the problems?

When environmental philosophy emerged, the arguments put forward by various philosophers posed a challenge to traditional human-centred approaches to our relationship with the natural world and its inhabitants. Environmental philosophers were, and still are, very much interested in the responsibilities that human beings might have to nonhuman entities, as well as interested in providing explanations for why we have such responsibilities. In enquiring into the extent of our moral responsibilities to the nonhuman world and why we have such responsibilities, many such philosophers advocated a new approach to ethics; an approach that extended the sphere of morality beyond human beings. Indeed, many environmental philosophers used rational argumentation to extend the sphere of morality to include other than human creatures and even whole ecosystems. There then emerged a range of environmental ethics theories, each of which stipulated to which things we have obligations and why, and as such each of which said something

about the extent of our moral responsibilities. (Environmental ethics theories are theories about which things have standing in the moral sphere and why. Environmental ethics as a discipline studies ‘the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents’ (Brennan and Lo, 2008).) Further, as Andrew Brennan and Yeuk-Sze Lo helpfully note, ‘Environmental philosophy also investigated the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its nonhuman contents’ (ibid., 2008); intrinsic value being a nonderivative or an independent value, and a value that is distinct from instrumental value. (We will talk more about intrinsic value below.)

Traditional Western ethical perspectives on the extent of our moral responsibilities are anthropocentric in that moral concern is limited to human beings since, according to anthropocentric views, human beings are deemed to be the only beings with moral significant interests. Attfield describes anthropocentrism as ‘A stance that limits moral standing to human beings, confines the scope of morality and moral concern to human interests, and regards nothing but human well-being as valuable intrinsically. (Literally, anthropocentrism of values, norms and principles)’ (2003, p.188). It is important here to grasp the meaning of ‘moral standing’. A thing has moral standing if it should be included in our moral considerations or if it matters in a moral sense. In its recognition of the moral standing of humans only, many environmental ethicists argued that the traditional anthropocentric view was too narrow an ethic to deal adequately with the emerging environmental problems, many of which were thought to be caused in the first place by a human chauvinistic approach to the nonhuman world. Much of the work in environmental philosophy could be seen to question the assumed moral superiority of human beings to members of other species on earth.

Emergence

At the beginning of the emergence of environmental philosophy there were a number of authors who advocated a new approach to ethics. These included:

- Richard Sylvan (see his article ‘Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?’, 1973).
- Arne Naess (see ‘The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement’, 1973).
- Holmes Rolston III (see ‘Is There an Ecological Ethic?’, 1975).

However, before this, Aldo Leopold, author of *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), had advocated a new ethic of conservation, which he coined ‘the land ethic’. This ethic ‘enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land... 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’ (Leopold, 1998 [1949], pp.88-89). Leopold talked of a moral relation to the land; a relation that requires ‘a high regard for its value’ (value here meaning something a lot more than mere economic value) (ibid., p.99). Indeed, in arguing against the prevailing ethic, which viewed the

land-relation as an economic relation, he argued for an ethical land-relation, and believed that our current ethic should, at the very least, be extended to include the land as a whole. For Leopold, our treatment of the nonhuman world 'is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise' (ibid., p.99).

Although Leopold's land ethic did not provide 'a systematic ethical theory or framework to support his ethical ideas concerning the environment' (Brennan and Lo, 2008), his claims were influential in their suggestion that a new ethic, or at least a modification of the dominant ethic, was needed to cope with environmental problems, for traditional anthropocentric ethics permits actions that do irreparable harm to the environment and its inhabitants. As Leopold says, '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' (Leopold, 1998 [1949], p.91).

Richard Routley (later Richard Sylvan), an Australian philosopher, was one of the philosophers influenced by the land ethic. In his article 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?' (1973) he notes that the 'dominant Western view', what he calls 'the Western superethic', does of course deal with our relation to the nonhuman world; it does indeed stipulate man's relation to nature. According to such an ethic, man is deemed free to do as he pleases as long as his actions do no harm to other human beings or himself:

The liberal philosophy of the Western world holds that one should be able to do what one wishes provided (1) that he does no harm to others and (2) that he is not likely to harm himself irreparably. 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 the freedom principle because it gives permission to perform a wide range of actions providing they do not harm others (Routley, 1973, p.207).

Routley wanted to challenge the human chauvinism apparent in such an ethic, and in doing so challenge the idea that values are determined by human interests. He believes that according to the Western ethic only humans have independent moral value. Nonhuman entities have merely instrumental value and can be used at man's will:

The earth and all its contents thus have no intrinsic value, but at best have instrumental value and so can create no direct moral constraints on human action. For what has only instrumental value is already written down in this framework as serving human interests... It is permissible for humans to treat it as they will in accord with their interests (Routley and Routley, 1995, p.127).

As suggested in the introductory section of this lecture, the view that everything in the world can be traced to human well-being and interests is anthropocentrism. For Routley, this dominant ethical tradition is too exclusive as environmental ethic, and permits

actions that would be morally wrong on environmental grounds; accordingly, for Routley, a new ethic is indeed needed.

Leopold's claim that the land as a whole is an object that deserves moral considerability was also influential in its suggestion that ecological wholes, such as species and ecosystems, rather than individuals, have moral value. Indeed, Holmes Rolston III argued that we have a responsibility to give moral consideration to species: 'In an evolutionary ecosystem, it is not mere individuality that counts, but the species is also significant because it is a dynamic life form maintained over time. The individual represents... a species in each new generation. It is a token of a type, and the type is more important than the token' (Rolston, 1998, p.134). We can see then that, for Rolston, species are morally considerable over and above the individuals that make up a species. A species, he claims, is a '*vital* living system', and maintaining the integrity of such a living system is more important than protected the integrity of individuals (ibid., p.135). Like Routley, Rolston highlights actions that are morally problematic yet permissible on anthropocentric grounds:

Certain rare species of butterflies occur in hummocks (slightly elevated forested grounds on the African grasslands). It was formerly the practice of unscrupulous collectors to go in, collect a few hundred specimens, and then burn out the hummock with the intention of destroying the species, thereby driving up the price of their collections (ibid., p.133).

For Rolston, such actions are morally wrong, since a species has a value in itself, irrespective of the monetary rewards accrued from its destruction. Indeed, Rolston argues that species have intrinsic value and are more valuable than the individual members of a species. (This is a view that is not without its problems, but we will discuss problems associated with this view in a subsequent lecture.) Like the philosophers talked about above, Rolston effectively challenged the idea that the natural world is without its own value, or without a value that is not derived from that which human beings consider to be of value.

Another influential work in the environmental philosophy literature was that of Joel Feinberg's 'The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations' (1974), in which he suggested that only beings that have interests can be regarded as having moral standing. We might here ask *why* it is supposed that beings with interests have or can have moral standing. Well, entities with interests are entities that can be affected for better or for worse by the actions of an agent. They are capable of being beneficiaries of actions (and of omissions). Indeed, Joel Feinberg suggests that to have interests a being must be capable of being harmed or benefited. A being that has no interests does not possess this capability. As he says, 'a being without interests is a being that is incapable of being harmed or benefited, having no good or "sake" of its own' (1974, p.51). We should note at this point that it is generally agreed that whatever has interests is deserving of moral consideration and that a thing that has interests is a thing to which we have some sort of responsibility to treat as if it matters in some way. However, while there is an agreement about the link between interests and morality, there is little agreement about which things can be said to have interests, so the question remains as to the criterion for moral standing

or for the possession of interests. If humans have interests of a morally relevant kind, do all sentient animals have such interests too? There is no doubt that they do. At the very least, they have an interest in not suffering. In spite of this, that sentient animals have morally significant interests and interests that are capable of outweighing human ones is still something that is questioned by philosophers and lay-persons alike. What about things such as trees, plants, rivers and mountains? Do they have interests of a morally relevant kind? Whether they do so is a matter of much debate between environmental ethicists, as we shall see in a later lecture.

Deep and shallow

Underlying disagreements about how we should set out humans' relations to the nonhuman world was the distinction between 'shallow' and 'deep' environmental positions. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, in his paper 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement', first introduced this distinction (1973). Naess defined the 'shallow ecology movement' as concerned with the 'fight against pollution and resource depletion' and with the 'health and affluence of people in the developed countries'. This movement is anthropocentric in its outlook. In contrast to this movement, the 'deep ecology movement' advocates 'biospheric egalitarianism'; the equal right of all organisms to live and bloom 'in principle' (Naess, 1973, p.95).

The terms 'shallow' and 'deep' have been used frequently amongst environmentalists. A shallow position may be seen as one that reduces concern for the environment and its inhabitants to concern for the interests of human beings. A deep view is one that is committed to the interests of life forms other than human ones. John Benson notes that the use of these terms is problematic as 'shallow' usually conjures up thoughts of something bad, and 'deep' conjures up thoughts of that which is good, so anyone who defends a shallow position may be automatically viewed in a bad light. He suggests alternative labels — 'light green and deep green' environmentalism (Benson, 2000, pp.16-17). There are weaker and stronger versions of both light green environmentalism and deep green environmentalism. But the weaker and stronger versions of the former movement all have something in common; they recognise the moral standing of humans only, and argue that only humans have value in their own right or a nonderivative value. Likewise, the weaker and stronger versions of the deep green movement all have something in common, albeit something very different from the light green movement; they all claim that there are entities other than human beings that should be recognised as having moral standing, entities which have value in their own right or independent value (weaker versions may, for example, argue that all living things have moral standing, and as such are deserving of moral consideration, whilst stronger versions may argue that ecosystems and species, rather than individuals, have moral standing).

Intrinsic value

So far we have mentioned 'independent value' but have said little about what one might mean by this. Before we discuss what is meant by this term, it will be helpful to note the distinction between instrumental value and independent value. Instrumental value is the

value of things as a means to some end. In this sense, a thing has instrumental value if it is useful in furthering some end. In contrast to this, independent value is the value of things in themselves, irrespective of their usefulness and of the value ascribed by valuers. In this sense, that which is of independent value has a value which is nonderivative. In the environmental ethics literature, when someone says that something has *intrinsic value*, she means the independent value just outlined.

In order to think more clearly about the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic value, let us consider examples of where these terms might be relevant. When I approach my manager to ask for a holiday, I am in some sense using him as a means to my own end: he is the means by which I am able to take time off work. In this way he can be seen as having instrumental value. He also ensures the smooth running of the company, and ensures that its employees get paid on time, etc. In these ways too, he can be seen as having instrumental value. However, he also has value in his right; although he is useful in my being able to book time off work, I recognise that he has a good independent of his usefulness, a good or value that is not derived from his usefulness or from how others may value him. There is a sense in which he has a *good of his own*; he is not merely *good for* booking holidays or ensuring the smooth running of the company, etc. Since he has a good of his *own*, he can be seen as having *value in his own right*, whether or not he is good for achieving some end or another, and it is because of this that we are able to say that there is something about him that has intrinsic value. Consider another example. A plant may have various beneficial properties or qualities, including medicinal properties, properties that allow for nourishment and hydration, as well as qualities that enable people to gain pleasure from the plant's aesthetic appearance. As such, the plant will be instrumentally valuable in a variety of ways. However, if the plant also has its *own* good, if it has some value *in itself* independent of its use, then it can be said to have independent or intrinsic value.

Robin Attfield provides a very clear outline of intrinsic value:

In current philosophical usage, what is of intrinsic value is what is good or of value in itself, rather than of value extrinsically, or through its relations to other things. Kinds of extrinsic value include inherent value (the kind that belongs to the objects of valuable experiences which make those experiences possible), contributive value (as when the character of a friend enhances the quality of a friendship), and instrumental value, as when something (my word-processor, for example) is valuable simply as a means to a further state of affairs beyond itself. (Natural beauty is a good example of inherent value; as its value plausibly depends on actual or possible appreciation, it should not be regarded as bearing intrinsic value.) But not everything which is of value (I will be arguing) can be so extrinsically. Some things must be of value in themselves and for no reason beyond themselves; and thus their value is nonderivative and independent, and may be called 'intrinsic'. And whenever this is so the state of affairs in question will supply a reason for action which is independent of other desirable end-states or values, and which derives from nothing but itself. Accordingly, intrinsically valuable states of affairs will be ones which there are nonderivative reasons to foster, desire, or cherish. Some states of affairs will doubtless be both of intrinsic value and of instrumental value, being valuable

both intrinsically and derivatively. A person's being educated may be an example, as it is plausibly both a good in itself and a means to ulterior goods, such as earning a living. But the possibility of the two kinds of value being present together does not in any way remove or weaken the distinction between them, despite claims (of John Dewey and others) to the contrary' (Attfeld, 1995, pp.30-31).

One way to think more clearly about intrinsic value is to consider the distinction between objective and subjective value: 'Value is objective if its existence and nature is independent of a subject. Value is subjective if it owes its existence... to the feelings or attitudes of the subject' (Frondizi, 1971, p.19). Indeed, if nothing of independent value existed then in attempting to explain what is of value and why, there would be an infinite regress of valuation judgments with no real value ever being established and no foundation for those judgments. As Frondizi says, 'If there were no values, what would we evaluate? To confuse valuation with value is like confusing perception with the object perceived' (ibid., p.ix).

Thought experiments and intrinsic value

In order to further consider intrinsic value, we will now turn to a thought experiment. Thought experiments allow us to reach conclusions about intrinsic value by referring to common moral judgments which most people would form in the face of such examples.

Routley's Last Man Example

Routley's 'Last Man Example' is designed as a counter-example to anthropocentric principles (that is, the principles that humans have a value over and above everything else, and that actions are permissible as long as they do no harm to humans):

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... 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) (Routley, 1973, p. 207).

Here then we are being asked to imagine a case where there is one surviving man left on the earth. (One could imagine that all other human beings have died due to nuclear fallout resulting from a nuclear war.) Does the survivor do wrong if he needlessly destroys every living thing left on the planet? Most would say that he does indeed do wrong, and he does wrong because the living things he kills matter in a moral sense. Such a response is non-anthropocentric since it locates value in something other than human beings, such as the good of nonhuman animals. Of course there will be some people who will say that he does wrong because in killing all living things *he harms himself*, for he has some sort of interest in these living things remaining alive. This response ties in with anthropocentrism because it implies that human interests alone matter in a moral sense;

the living things that the last man kills *do not matter in themselves*, but matter only because they have some use for that which is really considered to be of value – the last human himself. However, according to anthropocentric principles, as long as Mr Last Man is deemed not to harm his own interests then what he does could be seen as permissible. Indeed, Routley claims that his action may ‘conform with the basic human chauvinist principle’ (ibid., p.208); that principle being the harm principle (actions are deemed permissible as long as they do no harm to human beings).

Let us now qualify the thought experiment further and remove all possibility of Mr Last Man being able to say that what he does is not in his own interests. If we remove human interests from the example, then we may be able to see if that removes a reason for saying that the last man does wrong. If it does not, then there is reason to think that in situations concerning destruction of the natural environment, the fact that an action goes against human interests is not the only reason for judging such acts to be wrong. (For more about the use of hypothetical examples, see Benson, 2000, p.22.)

The following qualified thought experiment is presented by Robin Attfield. Imagine that, apart from the last man, there is one surviving tree left on earth. All other living things have died. Let us imagine that the last tree could multiply if left alone.* Does the survivor do wrong if he *needlessly* chops down the last tree? Most people would suggest that he does do wrong. If the last man does wrong, it must be that there is something about the tree that counts. There must be something good that can happen to the tree, or perhaps there is something good about the tree that counts as a reason against chopping it down. It has been argued that the judgment that it is wrong to destroy the tree unnecessarily implies that there is something about the tree that is of nonderivative value. Indeed, Attfield argues that ‘our judgments about the Last Man example suggest that the good or the flourishing of trees... is of intrinsic value, and embodies... one of the reasons why they should not be needlessly destroyed, and why such destruction would be wrong’ (1995, p.33). Attfield would argue then that trees count because they have a *good of their own* and *interests of their own*. Their good lies in their *thriving* in a way that is natural to their own species. Such thriving is of independent value.+ He would further argue that both non-conscious and conscious living things have a good of their own, and that the good of beings lies in the flourishing of their capacities or their well-being. Flourishing and well-being can be seen to be states that are intrinsically valuable (ibid., pp.36-39); that is, they are valuable *for their own sake*.

These last man examples would suggest to many that actions can be wrong even if they

* This further imaginary scenario is one presented by Robin Attfield in his ‘The Good of Trees’, in *Environmental Philosophy: Principles and Prospects* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994), p.168 (though it is, of course, derived from Routley’s Last Man example) and for present purposes it will be used to examine some judgments about the value of trees. Routley’s original example will be returned to shortly.

+ One of the best ways for addressing intrinsic value is by thought experiments. See Robert Nozick’s Experience Machine (Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Basic Books, 1974), pp.42-45). See also Donald Scherer’s Planet Lifeless and Planet Flora (Scherer, ‘Anthropocentrism, Atomism and Environmental Ethics’, in *Ethics and the Environment*, eds. Donald Scherer and Thomas Attig (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp.73-81).

do no harm to humans. As the last man destroys nothing of value to humans and we do consider him to act wrongly, then it is not true that only things that are of use to humans have value or that no action is wrong unless it harms some human being. The last man examples thereby further suggest that our moral concern should not be confined to humans alone.

Anthropocentric responses: against the value of nonhuman beings.

- John Benson discusses anthropocentric responses to Routley's last man example (see Benson, 2000, pp.21-23). There are some anthropocentrists who claim that the last man does nothing wrong and destroys nothing of value (ibid., p.23).

Response:

However, such claims contradict our judgments about the last man. They seem to be implausible and until supported they should ideally be rejected. Indeed, such claims would permit us to destroy all life on earth if such life was of no benefit to humans, something that most of us would regard as appalling.

- Others, such as John Passmore, argue that although the last man does wrong it is not because there is something about nonhuman life that has independent value, but rather because what he shows is the vice of vandalism (Passmore, 1980, p.217). This suggests that the destruction by the last man is seen as a deficiency in his character (Benson, 2000, p.22); the last man does wrong because he is exercising a bad disposition of character, that is, a disposition towards havoc. For Passmore then it is the wrongness of vandalism that accounts for our judgments about the last man.

Response:

However, Benson argues that there has to be something independent of vandalism that makes vandalism wrong. Our reason for regarding it as wrong is that it leads to the destruction of things that we value, that is, it destroys things of value to human beings. If this is what makes vandalism wrong it should not matter that the last man is destructive as there are no other humans to suffer from the loss of what he destroys or suffer from his bad disposition of character (ibid., p.23). Benson's point here then is that vandalism has to be doing harm to something of value for it to be vandalism, whether this be aesthetic value or independent value.

- Benson's own response to the last man is that in destroying all nonhuman life he does harm human interests, for he harms himself (this response was briefly discussed above). In this respect he undermines his own interests (ibid., p.23), and this is why he does wrong. Benson then denies that the last man's action harms no human, and denies that the last man destroys nothing of use or value to humans. Benson appeals to well-being as a reason why the last man undermines his own interests; the appreciation of the natural world, Benson argues, is essential for his well-being (ibid., pp.33-35). Bryan Norton makes a similar claim. He argues that humans have an ecological need to interact with the natural world, and that nature

is important to us as humans as it increases the quality of our lives (Norton, pp.143-51). To destroy the natural environment and its inhabitants is wrong because of the 'loss of richness from the human experience' (ibid., p.149). For Norton then bio-diversity enriches the quality of our lives.

Response:

However, Benson's appeal to well-being is dubious. It is not certain that we all have a need to appreciate the natural world. Likewise, the claim that experience of the natural world is an evolutionary need, passed on through generations, is unconvincing. Even if some humans do have such a need it is not clear that all humans do, especially when we consider city dwellers who hardly ever see any forests or other uncultivated natural environments and do not feel the need to do so either (Attfield, 2003, pp.69-71). And, as Routley says, 'ethical principles if correct are universal' (Routley, 1973, p.207), and it is unlikely that Norton's evolutionary need is a universal need. It is even more improbable that the last man would have such a need. For Norton and Benson to plausibly suggest that the last man does wrong because he undermines his evolutionary need, this specific need has to be watertight as a universal need. However, can we be confident that the last man does undermine his interests by destroying nature and thus destroying the potential for fulfilling his evolutionary need? I do not think we can. It seems then that it is not the value of human interests that make the last man's act wrong, but rather it seems more plausible to argue that it is the independent value of the good of nonhuman entities themselves.

Benson does discuss extending his anthropocentric ethic to include all sentient beings, not just humans. On this extension the last man (in Routley's example) does wrong as he harms sentient beings (human and nonhuman), and destroys what is of use and value to those beings (Benson, 2000, p.24). This is an improvement to Benson's objectionably human-centred ethic. However, it could be argued that it is still too narrow as an adequate environmental ethic as it excludes all nonsentient life.

Actually, Benson himself recognises that some environmentalists would object to this extended ethic on the grounds that it is indeed too narrow. He notices that Routley could provide a counter-example (as an objection) to this extension by supposing that the last man is the last sentient being and he goes about destroying all nonsentient life on earth. In the light of this counter-example, it could now be objected that on the extended anthropocentric ethic what the last man does is permissible,* whereas on an environmental ethic what the last man does is still wrong (ibid., p.24). The extension of the human-centred ethic could also be objected to because its extension to include all and only sentient life excludes nonsentient human life, such as human beings who are comatose, and in this way it undermines itself if it supposed to be a variant on a human-

* In discussing this anticipated counter-example of Routley's, Benson is not thereby conceding that the last man's act here is permissible (though his reasons for not conceding this would have nothing to do with the wrong caused to nonhuman entities themselves). On Benson's anthropocentric ethic, as said above, in killing all life on earth the last man does indeed do wrong, for he harms what is of value to human beings or, at least, to the last man himself.

centred ethic.

It should be said that in discussing extending the anthropocentric ethic to include all sentient life, Benson does not actually wish to extend *his* ethic in such a way that it would recognise the moral standing of all sentient beings. In his further discussions it becomes apparent that, in discussing the extension, he seeks to show that sentience-based arguments can be founded on anthropocentric values. As he says, supporters of sentientism (sentientism being the stance that claims that all and only sentient beings have moral standing) 'argue that the reasons we have for granting independent moral status to (most) human beings oblige us, in consistency, to grant it to (some) nonhuman animals'. Benson further claims that sentience-based arguments 'rely upon drawing out unexpected consequences from moral ideals that we already have' (ibid., p.24), moral ideals which relate to why we value human beings. However, contrary to Benson, sentientism can recognise the value of all sentient beings independent of considerations of what we value about humans. That is, supporters of sentience-based arguments need not derive their conclusions from premises based on the value of *human* beings.

Benson believes that anthropocentric values alone can provide adequate protections for the natural world and its inhabitants, and we do not need to embrace an extended or a new ethic. For Benson, adequate environmental principles can be founded on anthropocentric ones. However, even if we go some way with Benson and suppose that the nonhuman world can be protected by an anthropocentric ethic (though not sufficiently so), the practical consequences of adopting an ethic which is more inclusive and not derived solely from human value would be abundantly different from the consequences of adopting an anthropocentric ethic such as Benson's (that is, one which attempts to provide protections for the nonhuman world by deriving its value from the value of humans only). An ethic which recognises the value of, say, all nonhuman animals, independent of what we value about humans, would have massive implications for animals. For example, adopting such an ethic (in practice) may mean that sometimes animals' interests would take moral precedence, even when there are human interests at stake, or that species that are unknown to us (and have little or no value for humans) would be given due consideration.

So, while Benson may seek to show (through his discussion of the extension of anthropocentrism to include all sentient life) that sentience-based arguments for protecting the environment are founded on anthropocentric principles, it is just not true that these arguments are always founded on such principles. Further, the consequences of adopting an ethic which is more inclusive would be vastly different from adopting an ethic which is derived solely from what we value about human beings and what is of value to human beings.

Perhaps in discussing the extension and particularly the anticipated counter-argument from Routley, Benson also means to reveal the inadequacies of sentientism (which supposedly fails to take account of nonsentient life) as opposed to anthropocentrism (which he believes can indirectly take account of nonsentient and nonhuman life). However, sentientism could take account of nonsentient life by arguing that its survival

and protection is of paramount importance for the flourishing of sentient beings. Besides, the extended ethic that Benson discusses is certainly a more inclusive ethic than anthropocentrism, since its adoption would afford genuine protections for all sentient beings, whether or not there are human interests at stake. (But it is not without its problems. For example, we could imagine that there are no sentient beings left on earth, but there exists much nonsentient life. On sentientism, directing a nuclear bomb at the earth that was powerful enough to kill all life on the planet would be permissible, whereas on an environmental ethic this would be wrong. Sentientism then still poses problems in being too narrow as an environmental ethic, in that it only considers sentient beings and their experiences as having value.*)

We have seen then that anthropocentric responses to the last man example are problematic. Of course, some might say that the example is so fantastical that it is unlikely that our responses can tell us anything about why the destruction of the natural environment is wrong or enable us to derive moral principles concerning our relations with the nonhuman world. As Benson notes, ‘Some hold that moral principles guide us in the common run of situations and cannot be expected to give a definite answer to what the right action is in extraordinary situations’ (2000, p.22). But fantastical or not, in the last man example, or at least in the revised example, the effects of the last man’s act on human beings are purposely isolated from the scenario. As such, if we still think the last man does wrong then it must be wrong because there is something about the nonhuman world that counts; counts in a moral sense. And if we think he does not act wrongly, then we should be prepared to see how far such a claim takes us. Indeed, as said at the beginning of this section, such a claim would permit us to destroy all life on earth if protecting or preserving such life was not in the interests of humans, something that most of us would regard as appalling. Benson claims that perhaps uses of hypothetical situations should be judged on their individual merits; in the case of the last man example, it does allow us to see the different reasons we have for saying that the destruction of the environment is wrong (Benson, 2000, p.22).

After reading this lecture you should now be familiar with the emergence of environmental philosophy; the views put forward by Leopold, Routley and Rolston, and how they could be seen to pose a challenge to traditional views regarding our relations with the nonhuman world; the deep and the shallow movements; the concept of intrinsic value; and finally with how an analysis of the various responses and counter-responses to Routley’s last man thought experiment can enable us to see why the destruction of the nonhuman world might be considered wrong, and how our reasons for considering it as such need not be based on human interests.

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* For another thought experiment that discovers value in the flourishing of nonsentient things see Donald Scherer’s Planet Lifeless and Planet Flora (Scherer, ‘Anthropocentrism, Atomism and Environmental Ethics’, in *Ethics and the Environment*, eds. Donald Scherer and Thomas Attig (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp.73-81).

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