

Level 5.



Undergraduate assignment feedback form
(to be completed by marker)

Student Name: <u>Raleigh O'Sullivan</u>	
Module title: <u>Environment, Sustainability & Philosophy</u>	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: Overall, this is a well written piece of work that engages with the reading material in a plausible manner. You reveal knowledge & understanding of many of the issues at stake, & in places there's close attention to the detail of the claims put forward in the texts. However, you would do well to present more by way of a critique; incorporating additional reading material into your presentation (of concepts & stances) could well enable you to present objections and evaluate their strength. However, in general, you've displayed a very good grasp of the essay question.	
Marker's signature: <u>[Signature]</u>	Date: <u>31/5/19</u>
Provisional mark: <u>66</u>	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

Low-capped

What, if anything, is intrinsically valuable and why?

Annotated Bibliography

Robin Attfield, *Value, Obligation and Meta-ethics* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995) pg 29-31 and 36-69.

To begin by answering this question I would look to Robin Attfield and his contribution to the discussion of intrinsic value. And, more specifically, what he outlines intrinsic value to be and further, where it is located. Attfield is a well-renowned and respected philosopher in the field of Environmental Ethics. His position as a Biocentrist¹ provides a knowledgeable and well-received platform to discuss such issues as intrinsic value. There are of course oppositions to Biocentrism, and to Attfield's position but nevertheless I feel that looking at Attfield's work is the correct starting point for an answer to any question regarding intrinsic value. This book chapter is a good starting place for answering the above question as it provides a definition of intrinsic value is, and it goes further into providing examples of where intrinsic value can be located.

The author provides a detailed and clear introduction of his intentions to the reader. The first chapter provides the information for the reader to follow, including that Attfield aims to 'introduce the notion of intrinsic value, defend it against misunderstanding, show it has application and relate it to the good of persons and other morally considerable beings.' (p 29) He also states that he will be discussing the notion that only conscious states of valuers are important, this extends to also including objects of states that have value. In the second paragraph, the author introduces the philosophical definition of intrinsic value, which is that anything that is good or has value in itself as an end can be considered to be intrinsically valuable. (p 29) The author also provides a distinction between intrinsic value, and extrinsic value. Extrinsic value, he defines as being valuable through relations to other things. This distinction is important to note, as it differentiates between a generally accepted view that what has value is linked to what it can do for people and what has value irrespective of what instrumental value it has. Attfield also provides an example of this distinction, '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.' (p 29)

Attfield includes objections raised by Thomas Hill, to propel his position further. These objections, of which there are three, involve metaphysical, epistemological and motivational ones. (p 30) Attfield defends the existence of the notion of intrinsic value against these misunderstandings in the following sections. He presents that while these objections may be plausible, they fail at being sufficient in their objection to intrinsic value. Further, he uses these counterarguments as defensible material for the existence of intrinsic value. The continuation of this chapter includes Attfield's presentation of how intrinsic value can be applied and to what it can be applied to. This section includes the discussion of the kinds of things that have intrinsic value, the kinds of things that cannot, and the reasons for their inability to have intrinsic value. Attfield offers these counter arguments against the existence of intrinsic values and offers the solutions to these problems, which leads to a strong position of supporting the existence of intrinsic value. This chapter by Attfield provides both background to what intrinsic value is and offers a conclusion for what can have intrinsic value and therefore would support my argument in answering the question of whether it is possible for anything to have intrinsic value and what does, if it is in fact possible.

The clarity of this chapter is to be relished, when one considers just how difficult the subject matter that surrounds the discussion of intrinsic value is, and further how it can be applied to matters of

¹ Biocentrism is the ethical position taken in Environmental Ethics, that says all living things are inherently valuable (have intrinsic value) and morally considerable.

ethics. My own observations of the chapter find that Attfield's discussion is highly descriptive and of utmost clarity.

Kenneth Goodpaster, 'On Being Morally Considerable', in *Environmental Philosophy: from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman et al (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2005), pp. 53-66

To approach the question from a different perspective, I would look at this paper by Kenneth Goodpaster on what it means to have moral consideration. This article is relevant because it is an inquiry into how morality can be assigned to beings and things. It follows to answer the question of what, if anything is intrinsically valuable, as moral considerability is explicably linked with intrinsic value. It is here in Goodpaster's paper where a different argument for intrinsic value is found, despite his conclusion ending in a similar position to both Attfield and Taylor who I will be looking at as another source. The author's intentions of the paper are to find what the specifications are for moral consideration and as a result what deserves moral consideration. (p 53, 55)

Goodpaster's states four clear and distinctive criteria for what he argues has moral considerability. *conceptual distinctions, rather than criteria.* The first being that his inquiry is solely into moral considerability and not moral rights. He gives a variety of reasons for this, the main reason being to keep the argument clear from any misunderstanding that may arise from discussion of rightful bearers of moral rights. (p 55) The second criterion is that moral consideration should not be confused with moral significance. This means, for Goodpaster, that even if non-human life can be considered less significant than human life, considerations to non-human life should still be extended. (p 55) The third point is the distinction between questions of intelligibility and substantive questions. Goodpaster sets out this distinction by posing two example questions:

1. 'What sorts of being can be (logically) be said to deserve moral consideration?'
2. 'What sorts of beings do, as a matter of "ethical fact" deserve moral consideration?'

Goodpaster does state that the separation of these questions is difficult to achieve, but he does aim in this paper closer to answering the latter over the former. (p 56) His fourth and final point, consists of the difference between questions of considerations and the limitations placed upon human fulfilment of these considerations. An example of this is it is quite often argued that our moral considerations for human life and the requirements of sustenance, shelter and protection lead to harm to non-human but Goodpaster seeks to divide this claim from the all-too-often claim that as a result non-human life does not deserve moral consideration.

After defining these criteria Goodpaster sets out to answer the question of what deserves moral consideration. He does this by outlining and analysing arguments put forward by Warnock, Singer and Feinberg as variations of arguments that assign moral consideration based on the concept of sentience and interests. Goodpaster whilst acknowledging that these arguments that sentience can be a condition for moral consideration, he gives arguments to support that it is not a necessary condition. After exploring these positions, the conclusion that Goodpaster reaches can be summarised in the following, 'the truth seems to be that the "interests" that non-sentient beings share with sentient beings are far more plausible as criteria of considerability than the "interests" that sentient beings share...but it is to say that...hedonistic capacities seem unnecessarily sophisticated when it comes to locating the minimal conditions for something's deserving to be valued for its own sake.' (p 62) Having discussed the contents of Goodpaster's paper, it is clear how it can provide a strong argument to the titular question, and why it has been included as source of information. Goodpaster offers that all living things deserve moral considerability, which he assigns to the concept of intrinsic value. This position, like Attfield is a Biocentric position, but it differs from Attfield's biocentric standpoint as Attfield's argument places human considerability higher than that of its non-animal counterparts. Moreover, I place more stock in Goodpaster's position on how intrinsic value is classified as it

Not accurate - applies the principle of equality to non-humans

removes the importance of sentience as a necessary condition of considerability, and intrinsic value. It is important to note that whilst moral considerability and intrinsic value are separate concepts, a relationship is formed between them, as if something, whether human or non-human, is considered to have moral considerability, it should follow that they have intrinsic value. This is because having moral considerability, is to assign worth to a being, and that worth or value must exist as a standalone within the being. It seems ridiculous to assign moral considerability to something that only has instrumental value, or no value at all, as the moral consideration would extend only to the being or thing that acknowledges or utilises the instrumental value, thereby negating moral considerability to anything that does not have intrinsic value.

Paul Taylor, 'The Ethics of Respect for Nature', in *Environmental Philosophy: from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman et al (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2005), pp.67-81

The final paper that I would use to answer the question posed is 'The Ethics of Respect for Nature' by Paul Taylor. The reason for this is it provides good support for my position of how intrinsic value is assigned. Similarly, to Attfield and Goodpaster, Taylor is a Biocentrist and holds the view that all living things have intrinsic value. But, even further Biocentrism as a view is closely associated with Taylor and his work in this paper. The biocentrism that Taylor holds differs slightly from the others, this provides a good contrast and more scope in answering the question posed. The argument from Taylor is much more focused on value being attributed to anything that ^{has the} potential to flourish and has goods it can aim towards and reach. (p 68)

The main focus of Taylor's paper is to argue for Biocentrism, and for the value of all life. He makes a point to distinguish this value from the traditionally held anthropocentric views, which offers that intrinsic value is only considerable for humans. Any other non-human life that is assigned value, necessarily will be instrumental value, or how useful it is for humans. In Taylor's own words '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 realisation of human values and/or human rights'. (p 67- p 68)

The paper proposes a four-pronged argument in order to support the position held by Taylor that non-human life have intrinsic value alongside humans. I have simplified his argument in the following four points:

- (1) Humans are as much animals as non-human animals, and they both share the same entitlement to the earth.
- (2) Ecosystems co-exist and rely on the flourishing of each other in order to survive.
- (3) Every living thing shares its nature to self-flourish with other living things.
- (4) Humans have been, and to some people, still are considered to have more considerations than that of their fellow animals.

Taylor also argues in point (4) that given the previous premises of (1), (2) and (3), to consider humans above non-human life is ludicrous as it violates these premises, and further, that to continue with such a viewpoint involves no more than bias to own our species. (p 70) Taylor furthers with this position by providing a dissection of anthropocentrism, and its belief in the greater intrinsic value of human life. He bases this on two potential motivations, the first being one of meritocracy and the view that human feats and abilities are more useful than that of non-human life. The second is a motivation from inherent value and gives three potential arguments often given. These are (a) the Greek rational man, (b) Cartesian Dualism and (c) the Judeo-Christian chain of command. Taylor provides strong

arguments against both the meritocracy and the inherent value and convincingly concludes that all life, including non-human life has intrinsic value.

This paper provides a good support for answering the question of what, if anything is intrinsically valuable, and why? Taylor writes persuasively and with great clarity on this subject matter and expresses accurately why intrinsic value exists and why it should apply to all life. He concludes that all life is intrinsically valuable, he reaches this conclusion through the joint effort of his four-pronged valid argument that finds the first three premises hard to argue against, and the fourth concluding that because these are sound premises it follows as well, and through his breakdown of our passed down systematic belief that humans are superior to non-human life. This paper would be a necessary part of my answer to this question as I agree with Taylor's conclusion, that all life has intrinsic value, and also believe his conclusion follows perfectly from his argument and it is for the reasons he outlines that I agree with his conclusion. As such, any answer I could give to the question of what, if anything is intrinsically valuable, and why, would be lacking without the inclusion of Taylor's succinct and powerful argument. The narrow scope of the paper focuses only on the moral obligation that we as moral agents hold for non-human life and so does not go so far as to answer questions relating to value between discrepancies that arise from the interaction of non-human life with other non-human life. Despite this, this paper does a fantastic job at answering the question of what has intrinsic value and so is an obvious source for my answer.

Bibliography

Attfield, Robin., *Value, Obligation and Meta-ethics* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995).

Goodpaster, Kenneth., 'On Being Morally Considerable' in *Environmental Philosophy: from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman et al (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2005)

Taylor, Paul., 'The Ethics of Respect for Nature', in *Environmental Philosophy: from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman et al (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2005)

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does
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