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Overall, this is a well-written essay that reveals a grasp of the key theories & arguments, as well as underlying concepts. In places, more precision would help to achieve a greater degree of accuracy in terms of presentation. That said, you are tackling difficulties in the topic head on, & not shying away from attempts to solve some intractable problems. In spite of its weaknesses, the essay has much strength. In particular, there's clear evidence of thorough reading & of a critical engagement with the topic.

63%

For completion by Marker 1 :
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HPPH7009

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, ASSESSMENT 2

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Outline and Assess the Total View.

In answering the essay question, our response will be broadly divided into two parts. To outline the Total View, we must first have an understanding of the principles of the theory and its relevance to environmental ethics. The outline portion of the essay will include an introduction to and familiarising of the Total View, exploring both the explicit definition used by Attfield in *Environmental Ethics* and the implicit requirements of this definition. By outlining the theory, foundations are laid from where we can understand and assess the relationship and possible consequences that the theory has for environmental ethics. The assess portion of the essay will examine the application of the Total View, focusing on the implications and resolutions to issues surrounding obligations to future generations. Our first area for exploration is whether the Non-Identity Problem prevents acting for the benefit of future generations. Secondly, we will address if the Repugnant Conclusion is an inevitable result of the Total View. Having completed the outlining and assessment of the Total View, we should find ourselves in a position where we are able to evaluate whether the theory is workable. ✓ Good intro.

In introducing the Total View, we must define the theory and provide context for its relationship with environmental ethics. At its broadest, ethics is examination of the concepts of rightness and wrongness as well as issues concerning moral consideration. The Total View is a value theory, with value theories largely concerning themselves 'with classifying what things are good, and how good they are'¹. Therefore, the Total View will concern itself with classifying and valuing whatever is

¹ Mark Schroeder, *Value Theory* (2021), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/value-theory/>> [accessed 15 August 2021].

considered to be right or wrong according to the ethical theory in question. According to Attfield, the Total View is defined as:

'The normative consequentialist theory holding that agents should optimize the total (rather than the average) balance of whatever makes life worthwhile over whatever detracts from it, in terms of the full ranges of foreseeable consequences of action and inaction'².

While the definition used by Attfield is brief, it is quite dense. Therefore, we must unpack and break it down into its key concepts. It should be noted that the above definition contains both explicit and implicit standards for the agent. Firstly, whereas metaethics involves the abstract discussion of the nature of right and wrong and applied ethics examines the application of ethics in particular scenarios, normative ethics concerns itself with ethical actions. As a normative theory, the Total View will focus on the criteria established by ethical systems that govern how the individual holding that ethic should aspire to act. Both explicit and implicit standards can be a part of a normative ethical system, with declarations regarding what is good implying that a person should behave in a particular way to facilitate that good. For example, an environmental ethic may hold that environmental consciousness is good. Therefore, one ought to be environmentally conscious. Secondly, the Total View is identified as being a consequentialist theory, making it part of the teleological system. According to these theories, the rightness or wrongness and 'the morality of actions and ✓ → policies depends on foreseeable outcomes'³. Consequentialist theories can follow either egoism or utilitarianism. Egoism supports the promotion of the good of the individual, whereas utilitarianism advocates that 'we always ought to do what will produce the greatest

But there are other varieties too.

² Robin Attfield, *Environmental Ethics*, 2nd edn. (Polity Press, 2014), p. 234.

³ Ibid. p. 223.

Its utilitarian variety tends
to be assessed in the
↑ literature.

good'⁴. According to Attfield's definition, right actions are those that optimise the total positive results. Therefore, it is implied that the Total View is more utilitarian in nature. Thirdly, the theory is not explicit on who or what is due moral consideration for 'whatever makes life worthwhile'⁵. While we will use 'wellbeing' interchangeably with this phrase, wellbeing changes depending on who or what is being considered. At its broadest application, the Total View could encompass the wellbeing of the biosphere. At its narrowest application, it could be concerned with only anthropocentric wellbeing. Fourthly, the Total View is committed to optimising 'the total (rather than the average) balance of whatever makes life worthwhile'⁶, with the total being 'the sum or aggregate of the values of its parts'⁷. The Total View's focus is not the even distribution of wellbeing or the maximisation of the individual wellbeing of its parts. As a result, competition between parts should defer to whichever part maximises the total wellbeing, meaning that the good of some parts can be traded off against that of others. Finally, a consequence of seeking to maximise total wellbeing means that the Total View must be unbiased in the maximisation of total wellbeing. The Total View is premised upon the idea that 'the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other'⁸. Should an individual's wellbeing be held in higher regard and at the expense of others, the possibility is open to lowering the total wellbeing. Any attempt to allow this would affect the maximisation of the total wellbeing which is being sought.

Having laid out the key tenets of the Total View, we are now in a position to view the theory in light of environmental ethics. As a consequentialist value theory, the Total View is occupied with the results of our actions. These results can exist over a spectrum of almost

⁴ Alan Lacey, *A Dictionary Of Philosophy*, (Routledge, 1996), p. 371.

⁵ Attfield, *Environmental Ethics*, p. 234.

⁶ Ibid. p. 234.

⁷ Nick Bostrom, 'Infinite Ethics', in *Analysis And Metaphysics*, Vol 10 (2011), pp. 9-59 (p.11).

⁸ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods Of Ethics*, 7th edn. (Hackett Publishing, 1981), p. 382.

immediate through to the distant future. As a result, the Total View should be viewed in light of optimising wellbeing for the future, be that the immediate future or distant future. Within environmental ethics, the Total View could look to optimise the future wellbeing of a number of environmental concerns. As seen, environmental ethical positions vary according to what is deemed morally considerable. At one end of the spectrum, anthropocentrism will 'confine the scope of morality and moral concern to human interests'⁹. At the other end of the spectrum, ecocentrism holds that ecosystems have 'a good independent of their component parts'¹⁰. Similarly, there are a vast number of individual environmental issues, such as pollution and global warming, that can affect the wellbeing of whatever is being considered. Due to the scope of environmental ethics, it is necessary to limit the discussion to a singular environmental ethic and topic. Therefore, we will focus primarily on the Total View and its influence on anthropocentrism as an ethical theory and the issues of obligations to future generations and population control. As a result, the 'balance of whatever makes life worthwhile'¹¹ will be considered primarily in relation to human wellbeing and future generations. Any environmental concerns will be discussed as a subsidiary part of anthropocentrism.

okay.

At its most basic form, any anthropocentric concern for environmental sustainability will be viewed in direct correlation to the support that the environment can offer to the human population. The growth in world population has significant implications for both the environment, those who are currently alive and the wellbeing of future generations too. Our management of and relationship with the environment will ultimately dictate the quality of life for not only immediate future generations, but also distant generations to come. We will use the Last Person thought experiment presented by Routley in 'Is There a Need for a New, an

⁹ Attfield, *Environmental Ethics*, p. 221.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 225.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 234.

Environmental, Ethic' to demonstrate this point. According to the thought experiment, the last human inhabitant of earth systematically sets about destroying every living organism. There are no possible future persons to replace the last person. Consequentially, there is no one to preserve the environment for. As a result, the question arises whether the last man has acted badly and why? If the Total View is applied from an anthropocentric position, moral consideration for maximising total wellbeing is limited to humanity. Environmental concerns are secondary to the wellbeing of humanity and are correlated with the interests of humans. Ultimately, the environment is reduced to whether it is to the benefit or detriment of human interests. In the case of the Total View, human interests concern maximising 'whatever makes life worthwhile'¹². With no current or future persons to that add towards the total wellbeing required by the Total View, the last person has done nothing wrong on the basis that none of his actions detract from the current or future total wellbeing of humanity. As a result, the last person is free to act in a destructive way if it does not detract from 'whatever makes life worthwhile'¹³ for themselves. Routley¹⁴ originally discussed the Last Person through experiment in relation to the Western Super Ethic and resulting Liberal Principle. The system discussed by Routley is deontological in nature, emphasising right actions over results and conferring the Liberal Principle which protects the individual. As seen earlier, the Total View is teleological and consequentialist. However, from an anthropocentric viewpoint, Routley's original argument and the Total View have the same result in the Last Person thought experiment. *Which one?*

Having viewed the Last Person thought experiment where destructive actions had no consequences for future generations, we will now consider the thought experiment where

¹² Ibid. p. 234.

¹³ Ibid. p. 234.

¹⁴ Richard Routley, 'Is There A Need For A New, An Environmental, Ethic' in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights To Radical Ecology*, ed by Michael E. Zimmermann and others (Pearson, 2005), pp 16-24 (p. 19).

Not necessarily

the same actions were carried out in a world where there are future generations. When dissecting the definition of the Total View, the theory is committed to the equal consideration of interests and maximisation of the total wellbeing. Therefore, questions arise regarding what future generations we are obligated to and how wellbeing is to be maximised across future generations. As a consequentialist theory, the Total View is dependent on being able to identify 'the full ranges of foreseeable consequences of action'¹⁵. Foreseeable consequence is a vague term, with the foreseeable consequences of actions having clearer results in the near future and more ambiguous longer-term results. Appreciating the full range of consequences becomes more difficult as we come to consider their impact into the more distant future. As a result, the consideration of the interests of future generations becomes almost impossible as the scope of our consideration increases. Similarly, the logistical issue of sustaining the total wellbeing across current and future generations becomes apparent. To what extent should future generations preserve and sustain the environment in order to benefit future generations? Ultimately, if the Total View is committed to 'equity between generations'¹⁶ in terms of interest, it will remain fixed on maximising the total wellbeing of each generation too. However, the total wellbeing of each generation and means by which total wellbeing is maximised may vary according to each generation. A solution to this issue is to limit the scope of moral consideration to either those existing or persons who will exist. Also known as the Person Affecting Principle, the idea suggests that 'what is bad must be bad for someone'¹⁷. On this basis, the consequences of actions are positive or negative according to whether existing or those who are going to exist are harmed or benefitted.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 234.

¹⁶ Attfield, *Environmental Ethics*, p. 109.

¹⁷ Derek Parfit, *Reasons And Persons*, (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 363.

While reducing the scope of moral consideration appears to resolve issues regarding the distribution of wellbeing into the far future, challenges do exist to this solution. Parfit presents an intriguing thought experiment in *Reasons and Persons*. In the Depletion¹⁸ scenario, the choice is available on whether humanity will continue to deplete the environment of natural resources or conserves those resources for later generations.

- 1) World A and Depletion. By continuing to deplete World A resources, immediate generations are able to benefit and the quality of life is high. A benefit of World A is the opportunity to travel. Person X is the child of a parents who were able to meet as a result of the opportunities to travel in World A. Unfortunately, the future generations of Person X suffer from a lower quality of life as a consequence of a depleted environment.
- 2) World A* and Conservation. By choosing to conserve World A* resources, immediate generations benefit to a lesser extent and the quality of life is high. There are fewer opportunities to travel in World A*. Person X* is the child of parents who met as a result of fewer opportunities to travel. The future generations of Person X* benefit from a high and stable quality-of-life.

The Depletion scenario is an example of the Precariousness of Existence¹⁹ within the Non-Identity Problem. Parfit alludes to the Precariousness of Existence in *Reasons and Persons*, asking the question 'Even if railways and motor cars had never been invented, ~~I~~³ would still have been born'²⁰? Beyond those already in existence, including those currently in utero,

¹⁸ Parfit, *Reasons And Persons*, p. 363.

¹⁹ Gregory Kavka, 'The Paradox Of Future Individuals' in *Philosophy And Public Affairs*, Vol 11 (1982), pp. 93-112 (p. 93).

²⁰ Parfit, *Reasons And Persons*, p. 361.

the identity and lives of future generations are in constant state of flux and remain unknown. Even the most trivial decisions have a number of consequences which will influence the lives and identities of future persons. Within environmental ethics, decisions that are made to benefit a particular future person will ultimately affect the circumstances which bring about that person's existence. Consequentially, the intended beneficiary may no longer exist, being supplanted by the actual beneficiary who is brought about by the changed circumstances. The Person Affecting Principle requires that the consequences of our actions are beneficial or detrimental to an identifiable person respectively. However, the change in circumstances will mean that the intended beneficiary is no longer going to exist. Therefore, that individual is no longer identifiable. If the person is no longer identifiable, then that person is not morally considerable according to the Person Affecting Principle. As a result, without positive consequences, the agent has no reason to act in a positive manner. Within the Depletion scenario, by attempting to benefit the future generations of Person X through being environmentally conscious, we actually change the circumstances for the future generations of Person X. Person X* and their future generations are the actual beneficiary of our actions. As we are unable to identify Person X* in a scenario where we adopt World A* and Conservation, we are unable to ascertain whether those actions are positive or negative. Consequentially, there is no motivation to select World A* over World A according to the Person Affecting Principle. ~~and the Total View as the consequences of seeking to maximise wellbeing are unforeseeable.~~ However, the intuition on the part of the reader is that World A* and Conservation is the better of the two choices. Furthermore, considering that the Total View is cumulative in so far that all lives add towards the total wellbeing, World A and Depletion is to the benefit of the inhabitants of World A. Choosing World A* and Conservation would mean that Person X and their future generations would not exist. If Person X did not exist, they would be unable to contribute to the total wellbeing. Only at the point at which Person X and their future generations become detrimental to the maximisation

of total wellbeing would it become necessary to alter the circumstances of their existence for the better.

Currently it appears as though the ~~Total View, modified with the Person Affecting Principle~~, is unable to justify a policy of conservation over depletion. If concerns are limited to those immediately accessible to ourselves, then future suffering as a result of the exploitation or destruction of the environment is acceptable for all those beyond our purview. Echoes of the Last Person thought experiment can be seen here. Whereas the possibility of future people is closed to that Last Person allowing for the destruction of the environment, the Non-Identity Problem closes off the possibility of knowledge of future generations. As a result, actions in both cases appear acceptable according to an anthropocentric ^{PAP} ~~Total View~~. However, Parfit is critical of this answer and identifies that 'lowering of the quality of life must provide us with some moral reason not to choose Depletion'²¹. As depletion of the environment is identified as implicitly bad when a better alternative is available and valuing wellbeing brought by persons to the world is a key component of the Total View, we are left with the options of either rejecting the Total View as a value theory or rejecting the Person Affecting Principle. Therefore, what is the result when we examine the Total View outside of 'a person-affecting form'²²? If our concern for total wellbeing now extends beyond the purely identifiable, then we are able to account for the existence of possible people who may come about due to our actions. With an unconstrained commitment to maximising the total wellbeing, the aggregation of all possible wellbeing becomes the litmus test for whether actions are correct. Such a policy results in the Repugnant Conclusion, which is illustrated by Parfit in *Reasons and Persons*:

²¹ Ibid, p. 373.

²² Ibid, p. 378.

'For any possible population of at least ten billion people, all with a very high quality of life, there must be some much larger imaginable population whose existence, if other things are equal, would be better even though its members have lives that are barely worth living'²³.

If people are reduced to a means to maximise wellbeing, as long as the inhabitants of these worlds have lives that do not become not worth living, then by increasing the number of people we are simultaneously maximising total wellbeing. We are able to demonstrate the Repugnant Conclusion numerically by imagining an artificial scale where the individual value of whatever makes life worthwhile for people can be measured. On this numerical scale that contains positive integers between 1 and 10 and negative integers between -1 and -10. All positive integers are indicative of worthwhile lives that will add to the total wellbeing. Alternatively, all negative integers are indicative of unworthwhile lives that will subtract from the total wellbeing. Using this system, we can apply a numerical value of the total wellbeing contained in the hypothetical worlds:

- 1) World A contains 10 people who all have a wellbeing of 10. World A contains a total wellbeing of 100.
- 2) World B contains 20 people who all have a wellbeing of 9. World B contains a total wellbeing of 180.
- 3) World J contains 1000 people who all have a wellbeing of 1. World J contains a total wellbeing of 1000.

The unsettling result of the Repugnant Conclusion for the Total View appears to be that by increasing the number of inhabitants of each world to offset the numerical loss of wellbeing

²³ Ibid, p. 388.

per life, we are able to create a system whereby World J is preferable to World A despite having a lower standard of worthwhile life. ✓ *Good*

In an attempt to solve the problematic Non-Identity Problem by removing the offending Person Affecting Principle, we appear to have encountered a further counter-intuitive outcome in the Repugnant Conclusion. As the Total View is committed to the maximisation of the total wellbeing by definition, are there any resolutions to the Repugnant Conclusion which makes the Total View more palatable? As the Repugnant Conclusion demonstrates the reductio ad absurdum of the extremes to which the Total View may be pushed, we are seemingly unable to affect the Repugnant Conclusion without in some way modifying the Total View to prevent this result. However, proponents of the Total View may simply accept the while Repugnant Conclusion may be a logical consequence of the argument, key realities of its application are ignored. *Richard* Hare questions the practicalities of implementing a system that would attempt to maximise total wellbeing through the increase in population size alone. Selected due to the scope of human existence that is encompassed, the concept of wellbeing must account for a number of different factors which appear to culminate in the overall wellbeing of a person. While theoretically World J is preferable to World A, the implementation of a system that produces World J would create so much harm that it would 'cancel the balance of advantage'²⁴. The numerous contributors to the overall outcome of 'wellbeing' would be affected by the continuous addition of people that those contributors would be degraded. If we consider finite resources, recovery timelines for resources and sustainability of renewable resources, there is ultimately a carrying capacity for the world. Breaching this carrying capacity should result in a general lowering of wellbeing over time until such time that the lower limit of wellbeing is reached, whereupon 'non-existence becomes preferable'²⁵. Therefore, the suggestion made by Parfit that the Repugnant

Use first name when first mention author.

²⁴ R.M. Hare, 'Possible People', in *Essays In Bioethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.67-83 (p. 68).

²⁵ Ibid, p. 67.

Conclusion can continue ad infinitum is incorrect. Ultimately, a point will be reached beyond which maximising the population is no longer sustainable as the world is incapable of supplying that population in such a way as to keep lives barely worth living. ✓

Good
Consequentialists need not reach a conclusion that's necessarily repugnant.

In conclusion, in our attempt to outline and assess the Total View we have endeavoured to systematically introduce the theory and evaluate issues that it may face. Our outlining included the use of a definition by Attfield which we then sought to deconstruct so as to better understand its implications. As a result, we were able to see that the commitment to maximising total wellbeing is achieved by aggregating the wellbeing of its parts. In order to achieve maximal total wellbeing, the theory must also be unbiased in its application. The interests of all parts must be considered equally, otherwise the commitment to maximal total wellbeing is jeopardised. The remaining assess portion of the essay continually referred to the earlier outline to ground any analysis. Initially we used Routley's Last Person thought experiment to introduce the issue of the consequences that current actions have on future generations. From here we were able to see how the Total View suffered from the Non-Identity Problem, whereby it appeared as though agents had no reason to select intuitively better options for future generations. After rejecting the Person Affecting Principle in an attempt to overcome this problem, we were faced with the resulting Repugnant Conclusion. Again, the Total View's ^{supposed repugnant conclusion} response was counter-intuitive. While the reasoning employed by the Total View appeared sound, the reality of the application of such a theory looks problematic. The sudden drop in wellbeing having an adverse effect on the population would prevent any such movement towards the Repugnant Conclusion. Therefore, while the above outline and assessment of the Total View is limited in scope, it ^{can be said that} ~~is our view that~~ the gulf between the theory and reality of the application of the Total View mean that the worse excesses of the theory should be prevented. Consequentially, the Total View is a viable value theory for population ethics.

as a consequentialist theory

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