



Undergraduate assignment feedback form (to be completed by marker)

Student Name: <u>Sam Neyland-Evans</u>	
Module title: <u>Env, Sustainability & Philosophy</u>	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: This piece of work reveals a very good grasp of the topic & of a coherent & plausible answer to the question. There is attention to detail in terms of the presentation, evincing an in-depth & critical approach to the reading material. That said, you'd do well to draw on other resources to further your discussions. Goodpaster, for example, & his four distinctions would add strength to some of your claims, & you could make links between the texts in a way that 'brings to the surface' the full potential of the arguments at stake (such potential is not quite realised or not fully brought out in the presentation). But, overall, this is a very well written piece of work.	
Marker's signature: <u>[Signature]</u>	Date: <u>3/6/19</u>
Provisional mark: <u>68</u>	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

Annotated Bibliography: 'What, if anything, is intrinsically valuable and why?'Attfield:

In the first chapter of his book, "*Environmental ethics*", Attfield details four environmental normative theories. Anthropocentrism maintains that only humans have intrinsic value and thus only human interests matter. Sentientism rejects this by contending that all forms of sentient life have intrinsic moral value, not just humans. Sentientism argues that because animals can feel pain and generally suffer this implies that animals have a 'good' of their own: to not suffer. All sentient creatures are therefore credible for moral standing and consideration.¹

Both anthropocentrism and sentientism, however, are criticised for being "too narrow to supply convincing theories either of moral standing or of value."² Biocentrism and ecocentrism attempt to offer a more broad account. Biocentrism claims that all living biological forms of life are worthy of moral standing. As much as the lamb has a good of its own, to grow into a sheep, so does the sapling have a good of its own, to grow into a tree. Biocentrism simply extends the scope of moral standing that sentientism initially argued for.³

Ecocentrism argues that entire systems of life have independent moral value, such as the water and rocks that form a valley. Once again, the scope of moral standing is widened further. It is important to note that biocentrists can claim that the overall system does have value, but that this value is derived from the inherently valuable biological forms of life that constitute said system. The critical difference between biocentrism and ecocentrism is that ecocentrists insist that ecological systems possess greater intrinsic value, whilst biocentrism rejects this view.

Attfield's definitions of each environmental theory provides us with a sound overview from which to launch the rest of our investigation. Each theory focuses on ethical value and scope. This scope is described as a sort of "moral considerability"⁴. Attfield states moral consideration is directed to those with moral standing. Therefore, each theory differ in their allocation of this moral standing/value. Attfield provides sound foundation for the debate on ethical value.

✓
Good overview

¹ Robin Attfield, *Environmental Ethics* (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), p. 10-11.

² Ibid, p. 10.

³ Ibid, p. 10.

⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

Singer:

Singer argues against Anthropocentrism by claiming that animals have a capacity for suffering and feeling enjoyment. If our suffering is inherently bad and our enjoyment is inherently good why is the same not true for animals? Animals can flourish and grow just like humans can and, therefore, have moral standing and are worthy of moral consideration. Thusly, animals have interests and intrinsic value.⁵

Singer goes on to contend that it is untenable to include talk of plants and nature itself into said extension. The destruction of a forest are "factors to be taken into account only in so far as they adversely affect sentient creatures."⁶ He argues this by claiming that, to some degree, we can understand what it would be like for a possum to drown; at the very least, simply horrible. However, the same cannot be said for understanding what it is like to be a tree drowning by its roots. His argument is that once we abandon sentience as our standard of moral value how else can we place said value? How can one reasonably adjudicate between the value of an oak tree and the value of a field of bluebells? Furthermore, it is difficult to refer to a river as having a 'good of its own' in the same way that a human or animal does. If we claim 'the good of the river is to flow into the sea' it is a purely metaphorical claim, not one based off of any intrinsic value of the river. What is 'good' for a river, a mountain, or a "guided missile"⁷?

✓ However, it remains to be argued why adjudicating between the value of an oak tree and a field of bluebells would be any less troublesome than adjudicating between the value of a lamb and a baby fox. Singer claims that any such argument would fall under being 'metaphorical'. However, how could one reasonably discern between the value of a lamb and a baby fox without reference to the same type of 'metaphorical' reasoning? If I discerned that the baby fox is more valuable it might be because I find the baby fox cuter. However, if I thought the lamb as being more valuable this might be because I am avert to violence and do not want to see the baby lamb being eaten by the fox. Both of these choices are based off of subjective reasoning; one aesthetic, the fox, and the other emotional, the lamb. Singer's claim that weighing up the value between a tree and a field of flowers is troublesome is untenable. This is because the same is true when weighing up the value of animals or even humans. Difficulty in adjudication does not nullify value. ✓ well said

Furthermore, it remains to be seen why biological forms of life, which possess the same desire to flourish as humans and animals, should not be included in Singer's dialogue. Whilst his argument that a 'guided missile' does not have a good of its own is valid, the same cannot be said for a sapling that has been growing for years to supply itself with the sunlight it necessarily needs to continue its flourishing. Humans, animals, and plants all share this goal: flourishing.⁸ If we all share a goal of flourishing why should our ethical dialogue restrict plants and other living organisms? Moral standing should not just be judged on whether one is capable of suffering, but also whether said entity has a good of its

⁵ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 276.

⁶ Ibid, p. 277.

⁷ Ibid, p. 279

⁸ Or in Aristotelian terms: 'eudaimonia'.

Is this the right word, for not all such forms have desires, do they?

All such form
Good part is distinction between moral standing & moral significance could be discussed on her

own. Therefore, Singer's argument against other biological forms of life as having intrinsic value is untenable. Therefore, Singer will be utilised as an antithesis against the thesis that all living organisms possess moral value.

okay.

Naess:

Naess argues for a type of *ecocentrism* that takes the form of several key principles. This is in an attempt to reject anthropocentrism and to develop what she refers to as "The Shallow Ecology Movement", which can be described as a concern for pollution and resource depletion but only because it benefits those living in developed countries. Briefly, each principle can be described as so:

(1)—to reject the '*man-in-environment*' image in favour of the '*total-field image*.' This means humans should accept being a part of the environment, instead of being above or separate to it.⁹

(2)—*Biospherical egalitarianism*. She argues we should adopt an egalitarian perspective that requires a respect "for 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."¹⁰

(3)—*Principles of diversity and of symbiosis*. Simply to accept and adopt the diversity of forms of life: "'Live and let live' is a more powerful ecological principle than 'Either you or me'".¹¹

(4)—*Anti-class posture*. Naess is in favour of any theory that widens "classless diversity".¹²

(5)—*Fight against pollution and resource depletion*. Her only comment on this principle is that it is important, but not exclusively. She comments that 'the shallow-ecology movement' only concerns themselves with this principle and doing so can be detrimental as it neglects the other critical principles.¹³

(6)—*Complexity not complication*. She maintains that a complex life will require a complex understanding. However, this is not to say we should complicate these understandings.¹⁴

(7)—*Logical autonomy and decentralisation*. We should aim to decentralise local governments in order for them to be able to make the most ecologically applicable policies regarding their specific local area: "Local autonomy is strengthened by a reduction in the number of links in the hierarchal chains of decisions."¹⁵

Naess' position provides an argument that places value on entire ecological systems and has value in being used to bolster such a position. However, her argument possesses the problem of a potential *ethical overload*. *Ecocentrism* is correct for highlighting the importance of ecological systems having value over and above the individual. However, as

⁹ Arne Naess, "The Shallow And The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary*", *Inquiry*, 16.1-4 (1973), p. 95.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 95-96.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 96.

¹² Ibid, p. 96-97.

¹³ Ibid, p. 97.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 97-98.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 98.

one can see, Naess' position covers many large scale topics such as pollution, resource management, egalitarianism, hierarchal classes, diversity, autonomy and decentralisation. It is easy for one to lose focus or to feel overwhelmed if one is presented with too many large scale moral problems. A similar criticism arises within Utilitarianism: if one is constantly concerned with the well-being of the collective, does this not rob the individual of considerations towards their own personal affairs and projects? Thus the question is raised: what good is there in placing value on entire ecological systems when this can potentially rob individuals of the private consideration towards their loved ones and friends?

Furthermore, each of Naess' principles are lacking in detail. One would assume her second principle, *Biospherical egalitarianism*, would detail a core concept within her argument. However, what we get is reference to "*The equal right to live and blossom* is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom." One might agree with this sentiment. The framework for said position, however, is lacking. Each respective principle is detailed in no more than three brief paragraphs each. Naess even concedes that her principles are "vague generalisations, only tenable if made more precise in certain directions."⁹⁸ She might be correct in placing value on the ecological system, however, because her argument is lacking fundamental framework it is troublesome to say with certainty that her position on moral value is either tenable or untenable. Therefore, Naess' paper should be avoided in discussion of intrinsic value.

Do ecosystems have
instrumental or
intrinsic value?
Are our obligations to them
direct or indirect?

Taylor:

Taylor's Biocentrism is composed of four components: (1) Human beings are thought of as members of Earth's community of life. (2) The Earth's natural ecosystems as a totality are seen as a complex web of interconnected elements. (3) Each individual organism is conceived of as a teleological centre of life, pursuing its own good in its own way. (4) 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 favour.¹⁶

Furthermore, Taylor describes all individual organisms as "teleological centres of life"¹⁷. He posits that from this position we understand that each form of life has objects that can be either beneficial, harmful, or neutral to the entities well-being. For a flower and trees, water is beneficial, droughts (generally) are harmful, whilst a mild breeze generally makes no difference. For humans and animals, food is beneficial, wounds are harmful, whilst a drop of rain makes mostly no difference. Taylor insists that the entity need not be conscious of what is happening to it for these features to make an impact on its self. A flower is not conscious of toxic fumes and yet will react to them nonetheless. Therefore, due to plants having a good of their own, despite potentially not being conscious of it, they possess inherent value and thusly moral standing.

Good!

Taylor's position is of use in arguing for all organisms to be included in our ethical dialogue of value, alongside humans and animals. His discussion of beneficial, harmful, and neutral factors upon an organism's well-being is insightful. However, it remains unclear how one is to soundly adjudicate between clashing values of human interest and environmental interests. One might agree with the claim that it is morally permissible for a member of a tribe to kill and eat an animal out of said individual's interest in their tribe's survival. Similarly, one might agree with the claim that killing an animal out of pure sport is morally condemnable. However, what is one to do with the many shades of grey between these claims? Is it permissible to farm cows assuming we treat them with respect? Is it permissible to eat meat in general to satiate human cravings? Is it permissible to drive to work by burning fossil fuels? Taylor's position fails to provide an account for dealing with such conflicts of interest. Therefore, whilst utilising his paper to further bolster the position that all living organisms have moral value, his position also begs an important question. As a consequence of including biological, non-sentient, life into our ethical dialogue environmental, human, and animal interests will inevitably conflict. However, how is one to discern between said conflicts? Taylor provides a reasonable position as to why all living organisms have inherent value. However, it will be highlighted that his position is lacking a practical framework for how to respond to said conflicts of interest. ✓

Goodpastor's four distinctions would help here, as would Attfield's answers to such problems.

¹⁶ Paul W. Taylor, 'The Ethics Of Respect For Nature', in *Environmental Philosophy*, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), p. 70.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 73.

Callicott:

Should you mention that this is
a written hindsight of this paper
that contrasts the two branches?

Callicott aims to merge animal welfare theory with environmental welfare theory. This argument can be thought of as an attempt to merge the moral value of the individual with that of the total. He claims that philosophical unification, the idea that one idea or concept can explain all of morality, metaphysics, or reality is potentially dangerous. He highlights the awkward positions Utilitarian's find themselves in when trying to maintain the principle of utility, such as morally permitting the death of a family. Such unified theories struggle to offer guidance when values of equal interest are at conflict. Callicott posits that for a moral theory to unify both animal, human, and plant interests coherently it would have to provide an account of how we can discern between said conflicting interests. He argues this is plausible through merging Midgley's account of animal well-being with Leopold's 'land ethic'. One of the immediate similarities between both theories is their emphasis on altruism; Midgley through concern of animals and Leopold through concern of the land.

Callicott highlights another commonality between Midgley's "mixed communities"¹⁸ and Leopold's "biotic community"¹⁹. If we were to combine both of these positions, provided they would
us with the basis for a cohesive animal-environmental theory. Generally, we can expect an agent to value the interests of their loved ones above their community, and to value their community above another community. This general human preference is held to a higher regard than animals, whilst we value domesticated animals more than wild animals. It is clear that through this valuation that we place our value based on egoistic utility; whatever is of greater utility to us we value more with hopes that these feelings are reciprocated.

The priority of an object's moral standing is relative to the intensity of an agent's relationship with said object/subject. I have a greater duty to my mother than my friends. However, I also have obligations to my friends that I do not share with my wider community, and so on. Callicott merges this conception with Leopold's 'land ethic' or 'biotic community'. For Leopold, domesticated animals such as cows or dogs are regarded as being within the mixed community, amongst us humans. This is due to the intensity of value previously mentioned. Wild animals, however, belong to the biotic community, which is equivalent to describing raw nature. This helps explain why we might feel less concern over killing and eating a wild boar than we would killing and eating a dog. The same cannot be said for farm animals, however, as it is implied that farm animals 'rank lower' on the value hierarchy when compared to pets for example.

Callicott's merging of Midgley and Leopold's ethics is commendable in so far that it provides a rudimentary framework for a potential hybrid of both theories of value. However, the issue is that it is only a rudimentary framework. Callicott hopes to provide some method to discern between conflicting values between animals and environment. However, this method seems to rest upon the identification of the relevant entities as having instrumental value to us. We value our family more than community because it benefits us. Similarly, I
Will you assess
feature that you present
an assessment below, but a more detailed/in-depth assessment is needed than what you provide (below)

✓

¹⁸ J. Baird Callicott, 'Animal Rights and Environment Ethics: Back Together Again', in *Environmental Philosophy*, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), p. 137.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 137.

(Good - expand
Provide more
depth &
detail .

prefer my dog over a cow as it provides more benefit to me. Even though Callicott posits for a Humean-altruism, his method of discerning value is seemingly based on comparing instrumental value as opposed to the identification and comparison of some inherent value within the entity. This article provides a foundation for a more developed theory of value to be built upon. However, it should not be cited as a successful example of merging of both Midgley's and Leopold's positions under the criteria that its purpose is to elucidate how one can discern between conflicting moral interests as it fails to provide such an account.

Bibliography:

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