



Undergraduate assignment feedback form (to be completed by marker)

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Module title: <u>Environment, Sustainability & Philosophy</u>	
For completion by marker:	
Comments: This is an excellent piece of work which reveals a perceptive & comprehensive understanding of the texts. There is attention to detail in terms of the presentation, with ideas & arguments presented clearly and, for the most part, accurately. I think linking your support of sentientism to relevant objections to biocentrism (in a general sense, at least - i.e. in relation to the life criterion) could make your own view 'come through' a little more. You are entitled to have your own stance on the matter, so don't be afraid to be a little bit more explicit about your reasons for rejecting other positions.	
Marker's signature: <u>[Signature]</u>	Date: <u>30/5/19</u>
Provisional mark: <u>73</u>	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

Overall, this piece of work evinces an in-depth & engaged approach to the reading material.

Do non-human creatures have interests? Does this mean that they also have rights?

- Goodpaster, Kenneth, 'On Being Morally Considerable', in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* 4th ed., ed. by Zimmerman, Michael E., et al (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 53-66. ✓

Goodpaster's essay focusses on addressing what the conditions are for being considered from a moral point of view. Though acknowledging both anthropocentrism and sentientism (pp. 57-59), Goodpaster concludes with his own biocentric view that life is the necessary condition for being afforded moral considerability (p. 59). He justifies this view by arguing, drawing upon work by Feinberg for support, that all living things have interests that they seek to fulfil and that can be considered good independently of any instrumental factors (pp. 60-61). ✓

This is particularly relevant to the essay in question, as by setting the criterion for moral considerability as life, Goodpaster includes non-human creatures as having moral considerability by the very virtue of the fact that they have their own interests, which directly addresses the first part of the essay: "Do non-human creatures have interests?" What is of further significance to the essay are the distinctions that Goodpaster makes between terms, including the distinction between moral considerability and moral rights. He outlines moral considerability to simply be whether something is given the most basic level of respect, and rights to be more specific and be used to narrow what we afford certain levels of respect (pp. 53-55). This directly relates to the second part of the question: "Does this mean that they also have rights?" By making this distinction of terms, the difference between the *interests* of non-human creatures, and the *rights* of non-human creatures is clarified, so can be discussed as the two separate (though interlinked) issues that they are without the discussion being convoluted by confusion between the two. Although Goodpaster does not go into great detail surrounding rights beyond making this distinction, he provides a good starting point in answering that area of the essay. ✓

What is also noteworthy is Goodpaster's distinction between moral considerability, and moral significance. Here, moral significance is a comparative judgement concerning how much moral consideration something is afforded (pp. 55-56). This is relevant here because the level of moral significance attributed to non-human creatures can affect the judgement of whether they should have rights. Here, Goodpaster uses a very useful example to illustrate his point. His assertion that all life is morally considerable means that both a dog and a tree have moral considerability, however that is not to say that they are equally morally significant (pp. 55-56).

- Attfield, Robin, *Ethics: An Overview* (London and NY: Continuum, 2012), Chapter Two, pp.45-53.

Section two of Attfield's *Ethics: An Overview* has a focus on moral standing and value. The chapter reiterates Goodpaster's view regarding the moral standing of all life forms (pp. 45-46), while bringing other arguments into the discussion. These are views from Kant, arguing that human interests alone are what qualifies for moral standing, and views that would be supported by the likes of Hume, Mill, and Singer arguing for the recognition that non-human creatures are sentient as they can feel pain and pleasure (therefore have interests) (pp. 45-46). Although these are views mentioned by Goodpaster¹, here Attfield presents them more

¹ Goodpaster, Kenneth, 'On Being Morally Considerable', in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* 4th ed., ed. by Zimmerman, Michael E., et al (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 53-66.

Could the
other
distinctions
be her
answer to
the question?

Very
good.

impartially, because he is not presenting them as counterexamples to his own answer to moral standing as Goodpaster was.

Attfeld then links the subject of moral standing to the subject of value and valuations. This is of interest in regards to the essay because certain states of being (sentience for example) are what it often considered needed for beings to have value, so to be considered in a moral sense (p. 47). Here it is worth noting that even though things may have value, the valuation that they receive may not recognise this. This could be because the thing is not recognised as having qualities such as sentience that make give it value (pp. 47-48). In terms of the essay in question, this is particularly noteworthy because it demonstrates how, while it is evident that humans have been given a certain moral value and therefore afforded rights, there are instances where human perception of non-human creatures, when passing valuation, fail to appreciate the true value present, thus that non-human creatures' interests are not recognised and there is no assessment of whether it is deserving of rights.

Attfeld distinguishes between different kinds of value, covering intrinsic, instrumental, inherent, and contributive value. The point Attfeld is making here is that if all things are only valuable because of their value to something else (instrumentally valuable for example), there would be nothing to confer value onto without forming an infinite regression, so there must at least be some things with intrinsic value (pp. 48-49).

It should be stressed that having intrinsic value does not equate to having rights (p. 49). It is however a recognition that the being can flourish and that this flourishing has intrinsic value, providing reason to not harm that being where harming it is an option (p. 50). The varying ways this is considered by different theories is outlined by Attfeld, who includes the Kantian position, sentientism, hedonism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. The subject of value is strongly linked to interests, as what value interests receive (if any) is incredibly significant here. If it is accepted that non-human creatures have interests, which I would argue they can based on their ability to flourish, then the question of how much value these interests are given (compared to human interests) arises. This chapter also addresses this, by introducing Singer's view that "like interests should receive equal consideration." (p. 51). This naturally leads to discussion on Singer's sentientism where sentient creatures' interests are greater so should have higher value (p. 52).

Although the focus of this chapter was value, not interests or rights, it still remains highly relevant, because how much value we place on a being and its ability to flourish, determines with how much moral weight we consider their interests, which is likely to affect whether they are granted the status of having rights and to the extent that this is granted.

- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch.10.

This chapter has a focus on environmental ethics and where we place value on the things within the environment, including the values of future generations (pp. 269-274). He presents a conflict between valuing the interests of humans (employment, state income, etc) and the values the non-human creatures have that are endangered by human activity (pp. 264-265). He also discusses how attitudes in western ethics generally place much higher value on human interests compared to interests of non-human creatures and in some cases consider only humans to be morally considerable (pp. 265-269). This leads to the question of whether it is right that human values infringe upon those of non-human creatures. As will be seen as further explanation of this chapter is given, the issues discussed surrounding values are invaluable to the discussion on interests, as the two concepts are intertwined.

Good link with Goodpaster's distinction.

Good. Could link to Aristotle's 'Good'.

Could you refer/reference with here?

Only interests of sentient creatures are of direct moral consideration

Not entirely correct (Singer's view)

Singer frames this issue with the rather well-known hypothetical example of a dam being built. Building the dam would destroy the habitats and lives of countless non-human creatures, perhaps even wiping out whole species (p. 264). This example is used to demonstrate how the many interests of animals can be infringed against by human actions and asks if the suffering and deaths of these non-human animals are any less significant than the death of a human (p. 275). This is approached from the perspective of a utilitarian, so accepts that these non-human creatures do have interests to be considered in the equation (pp. 275-276).

Singer then goes on to give an account for the reverence for life as having intrinsic worth (pp. 276-284) like the biocentric approaches that would be addressed in the essay with the other works discussed here.² However he ultimately rejects this view in favour of sentientism. He believes a firm moral divide exists between non-sentient living things and sentient creatures (including non-human creatures) (pp. 276-284).

What is of particular use for this essay is the fact that despite the different accounts of what beings have interests from the biocentric, ecocentric and sentientist approaches, all agree that non-human creatures have interests (even if each approach makes different, more specific claims beyond this general conclusion. Furthermore, Singer goes into detail about why it is all sentient creatures that have interests and should be respected thusly (leading into potential discussion regarding rights) rather than just humans. This is achieved through Singer's introduction and criticism of speciesism, which he argues demonstrates why it is wrong to be limited by an anthropocentric ethical theory (pp. 265-274). The Chapter concludes with Singer arguing that, among the many anthropocentric reasons not to harm non-human creatures, their sentience (so capacity to feel pleasure and pain) should be enough reason. I would use Singer's points in the essay to argue that this sentience of non-human creatures is both necessary and sufficient to prove they have interests. This would then lead into discussion about whether or not this means they should be afforded rights.

Richard Sylvan, 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?' in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* 4th ed., ed. by Zimmerman, Michael E., et al (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 16-24.

As the title suggests, the main focus of this work is to discuss whether there is a need for a new environmental ethic. Sylvan identifies that our current ethic does not consider environmental concerns or factors to be moral concerns or factors (p. 16-17). He points out that the dominant western view clashes with environmental ethics (partly due to how it's rooted in ideas such as dominion over the Earth from a Christian tradition) (p. 17). It is also suggested that further development of our current ethic to be more in line with what is necessary for environmental ethics is what is required, rather than a completely new ethic (p. 17).

Sylvan gives attention to the liberal philosophy of western society: that one should be able to do as they wish provided it doesn't harm others, or harm themselves beyond repair. He calls this the 'basic human chauvinism' principle because it puts primary concern on human interests and little or no concern for anything else (p.19). The problematic nature of this principle to the environment is relevant here because it demonstrates how the possibility that non-human creatures have interests is not considered, let alone actually considering

² Attfield, Robin, *Ethics: An Overview* (London and NY: Continuum, 2012), Chapter Two, pp.45-53. and Goodpaster, Kenneth, 'On Being Morally Considerable', in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* 4th ed., ed. by Zimmerman, Michael E., et al (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 53-66.

✓ Okay -
Taking a
sentientist
stance
I wonder what
has you'd
critique
Attfield
Goodpaster
Taylor
biocentric
or the
criticism
more
generally?

Re-phrase for accuracy.

these interests. Sylvan illustrates this human chauvinism with 'The *last man* example.' (pp. 19-20). This example is useful in outlining how actions can conform to the principle of basic human chauvinism, but not to an environmental ethic. This picture is made clearer by the introduction of another example: 'The *vanishing species* example' (p. 21). This example considers the interests of humans in the hunting and selling of blue whales (the value of its oil and meat for example). It then goes on to show how non-human creatures (blue whales in this case) could have interests that should be considered as part of an ethic, reformulating the basic chauvinism to instead be a 'satisfactory freedom principle' (p. 21). This extends concern from just human interests to include non-human creatures as well (p. 21).

Sylvan recognises that radical changes to our current environmental ethic would require a reassessment of values and rights. This part is of particular use in answering the second part of the question, as Sylvan presents grounds for the amendment of the concept of natural rights so they apply to non-human creatures as well as just humans (p. 22). He discusses the relationship between interests and rights which is highly significant to the essay. Furthermore, he makes concluding remarks about how human interests are too narrow and limited to provide a good basis for deciding what is desirable for the environment. This is incredibly relevant as it brings into question whether it is even possible to establish the interests and how (or whether) these should translate to rights, from our own human perspective.

- Paul Taylor, 'The Ethics of Respect for Nature', in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* 4th ed., ed. by Zimmerman, Michael E., et al (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 67-81.

Taylor argues that it is the good (in terms of the wellbeing) of individual living beings that are what is considered moral. He contrasts this life-centred view to various anthropocentric views but is of the belief that a biocentric approach is the correct one (p. 67). He goes on to argue that accepting a life-centred theory of environmental ethics would mean a serious reordering of morals would have to take place to take into account the duties we have to non-human creatures where previously this had not been considered (p. 68). From this, he goes on to discuss how human actions can negatively or positively affect the good of non-human creatures. In other words, how we act can help or hinder non-human creatures fulfil their interests (pp. 68-69).

Taylor explains how, with a biocentric theory, all living things should be afforded some level of respect (p. 69) and that animals (and plants) have a good of their own (p. 71). The focus on the good of animals is what is of particular use in reference to the essay question, as their interests are what is being addressed.

Further in his work, Taylor outlines how humans are not superior to other animals, despite the fact that we have capacities other animals lack. He does this by pointing out that non-human creatures have capacities that we lack, and while we value the capacities that we possess more highly than theirs, that is simply because, to us, they are more useful. Likewise, to a cheetah, its speed is more useful to it. He questions if it is fair that these capacities are valued purely from a human perspective (pp. 74-76).

Also discussed is how different degrees of moral worth between different people (class distinctions for example) have been rejected by a modern western ethic. A belief in universal human rights is an example of this (p. 77). Taylor concludes this piece of work by explaining that while we should adopt attitudes of respect towards non-human animals, they should not be afforded the status of bearers of moral rights (pp. 80-81). He elaborates on this point, claiming that to assign them rights would be to give them 'legal entitlement to be protected' (p. 81) and that, though this would give recognition to the inherent worth that they possess,

Good!

Will you offer
(counter-claim(s)?)

the problem of competing moral claims between creatures would not be resolved. It is for this reason that Taylor believes greater focus should be placed on a biocentric outlook in which these creatures are treated with respect (p. 81). This discussion surrounding rights is particularly useful in answering the essay question, as it highlights the difficulty in assigning rights to creatures, as rights have legal weight whereas recognising value has moral weight. Taylor does not go into great depth into the discussion surrounding rights, claiming that it is too complex an issue so should be addressed separately (p. 81), however the little detail he does go into is enough to shed light onto the complexity of the issue. Despite not affording non-human creatures rights, Taylor's last remarks serve to emphasise how the presumption that human interests should be favoured above the interests of other animals is erroneous, and that we have a deep moral commitment to non-human creatures (p. 81).

I hope it you'll
argue against
his biocentrism?
(see comment, p. 3)

