



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment Coversheet & Feedback Form

For completion by the student: Student Name: Emmeke Marleen Vierhout		
Module code: HPPH7009	Student University Number: 1803420	Educational support needs: No
Module title: Environmental Ethics		
Module tutor: Rebekah Humphreys		
Assignment title: Annotated Bibliography		
Assignment due date: 27-08-2021		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism.		
Name ...Emmeke M Vierhout.....		
Assignment Mark		
1 st Marker's Provisional mark		
2 nd Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark		
External Examiner mark (if relevant)		
Final Mark		
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board		

For completion by Marker 1:

Comments:

Marker 1 signature:

Date:

For completion by Marker 2 / Moderator:

Comments:

Marker 2 / Moderator signature:

Date:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant):

External Examiner signature:

Date:

Singer, Peter, 'All Animals are Equal', in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman et al (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998).

Peter Singer's moral stance at the moment of writing this article is Preference Utilitarianism, a form of consequentialism which values actions that promote preference satisfaction.

In *Animal Liberation*, Singer argues for an animal liberation movement in line with the black and women's liberation movement. These movements invoked the principle of equality to demand an end to the discrimination they experienced on the basis of race or sex. (P25)

Singer shows us that this principle of equality could not be a prescription of some alleged factual equality, after all men and women are not factually equal, the principle is about equality of interests. And since different interests warrant different treatment, the principle also does not dictate equal or identical treatment. What the principle does dictate is equal consideration of interests. (P28) Among humans, the principle is a moral ideal that tells us how to treat other humans. And if we come understand the implications of the principle of equal consideration in full we will see that this moral ideal should be extended as to include non-human animals as well. (P26)

To be morally considerable according to Singer, a being must have interests which means that a being must be sentient. Following Bentham, Singer states that it is the capacity for suffering that is a prerequisite for having interests. Things like stones do not have this capacity, and therefore have no interests. Beings that do have the capacity for suffering next to humans, are sentient non-human animals. Any sentient creature has the capacity for suffering and thus has interests argues Singer. To deny these beings moral consideration is not fully apprehending the basic principle of equality and is what he calls, in line with racism and sexism, speciesism: "the limit of sentience,..., is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others". (P30)

Singer argues that in history, philosophers, while committed to the principle of equality, have gone to pains to reconcile their beliefs in human equality and animal inequality. (P33) They have invariably tried to come up with arguments that mark the boundary of moral concern in some characteristic that is limited to humans only. However, he says, these attempts either undermine the equality of humans, or provide no reason for excluding non-human animals under the principle. Singer illustrates his point by the argument from marginal cases, which says that if human infants, cognitively disabled humans or for example people in a prolonged coma are considered to be morally considerable, non-human animals must also be morally considerable. There is after all , no known morally relevant characteristic that the humans in the above mentioned cases have that other animals lack. If we are committed to the principle of equality as underlying our idea of moral consideration for *all* humans, the characteristic we are looking for *has* to be sentience. To mark the boundary for moral concern in some other characteristic like rationality or intelligence, would be to mark it in an arbitrary way. (P30) If we are not prepared to test our medicines on orphaned human infants because of the way in which they would suffer, there is no moral reason why we would want to test our medication on dogs or apes, "who are more aware of what is happening to them, more self-directing and ,...,at least as sensitive to pain as any human infant". (P32) The same reasoning goes, he says for the way we keep animals for meat production. Those who believe that in cases like medical testing and meat production, the interests of human beings 'weigh more' than the like interests of other species and allow the interests of their own species "to override the greater interests of members of other species" (P30) can be accused of speciesism, which is just as morally wrong as racism and sexism.

You don't need to agree with Singer's preference utilitarianism, to be impressed by the powerful logic of his argument. Most people agree that the capability of humans to experience pain provides a sound reason for recognizing a moral obligation not to inflict pain or suffering without good reason. And because nonhuman animals also can experience pain, there is no good reason for not extending these moral obligations to them as well.

I don't think however that Singer is justified in putting discrimination of animals on the same level with the discrimination of humans. It is true on the principle of equality that if we don't allow the white man to be beaten because of the pain it inflicts, there is no good reason to allow the black man to be beaten, neither is there good reason to inflict such pains on for example a dog. However while both the dog and the black man suffer from the pain and the anxiety caused by the beating, the black man *also* suffers from the *knowledge* that the beating is totally unfair and from the frustration this brings. And in cases where the injustice being done to human beings is not that obvious and does not cause direct physical pain, like institutional discrimination, the suffering caused by such ongoing unfair treatment can even be worse than suffering coming from temporary physical discomfort. Even though both humans and nonhuman animals can be recipients of (in)justice, I think it would be fair to say that animals do not suffer from the *feeling* of being treated unjustly, at least not on the same scale as human beings can. And I think that this is an important factor to take into account when we consider the suffering of animals held for example on factory farms.

Which brings me to a second problematic part of Singer's theory of sentientism, namely his idea that sentience is not only sufficient but also necessary for moral consideration. Consider the dairy farm I run with my husband in Ukraine where we keep about two-thousand cows. Our cows are being fed, have plenty of fresh air, are kept cool in summer, receive good medical treatment, and have enough space to walk around and are not lonely. Of course there are definitely ways in which their lives could be better, however, as much could be said of people who live in tiny apartments in skyscrapers in a metropolis who are not poor but still have to go to work six days a week to make ends meet. Not an uncommon way of living for a human being. If they don't suffer, why are our cows supposed to suffer? Of course the cows are killed after a few years, but if that is being done in a stress-free environment and quickly, then whether the cows suffer from their death is another philosophical question.

The local population also doesn't seem to suffer from our farm which brought employment and prevented a rural exodus so common in other parts of Ukraine. Maybe people suffer indirectly, because the environment is being destroyed? The cows are being fed with (waste) products coming from our own land, so no tropical rainforest has been taken down for our milk and no humans have been displaced. The manure is collected and spread on our land without the problem of a nitrogen surplus. Neither is the contribution of our factory farm to global warming bigger than that of hundred farms with twenty cows each, combined. I would dare to say that for efficiency reasons the impact of the factory farm per liter milk is even less. I don't want to deny that the meat and dairy industry have a huge impact on our climate and environment, but this is due to the *sheer mass* of this industry not due to factory farming as such.

So if no-one is suffering badly from factory farming, then from Singer's point of view, there is no good reason to be opposed to our farm being expanded to four-thousand or even six-thousand cows. However I do believe that there are moral reasons for being opposed to such expansion, reasons that explain my own discomfort even with the current size of our farm. A discomfort I feel despite my conviction that neither our

animals nor humans are suffering from it in a direct way and I think that Callicott (1980) expresses my concern well when he says that “the immoral aspect of the factory farm has to do far less with the suffering and killing of nonhuman animals than with the monstrous transformation of living things from an organic to a mechanical mode of being.” (P335)

Bibliography:

Callicott, J. B. (1980). ‘Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair’, *Environmental Ethics*, Vol.2, pp. 311-38.

In this article Bryan Norton wants to show that an adequate environmental ethic need not necessarily be a nonanthropocentric ethic, but that it does need to be a non-individualistic ethic. An adequate environmental ethic in his view is a recognizable normative ethic which upholds certain shared intuitions concerning the environment and which proscribes behaviors commonly seen as destructive to the environment. (P163)

Anthropocentrism he describes as the belief that 1) every instance of value originates in a contribution to human values meaning that nonhuman natural entities cannot have value independent of human value and 2) that all elements of nature can, at most, have value instrumental to the satisfaction of human interests meaning that moral reasoning is there to serve nothing but human well-being. (P164) The question is, he says, what counts as a human interest? To answer this question he introduces two sort of preferences human beings can have: *felt preferences* and *considered preferences*. A felt preference is "any desire or need of a human individual that can at least temporally be sated by some specifiable experience of that individual" and a considered preference being "any desire or need that a human individual would express after careful deliberation, including a judgement that the desire or need is consistent with a rationally adopted world view." (Ibid)

Norton (P165) proposes what he calls a *weak anthropocentric ethic* in contrast with a *strong anthropocentric ethic*. A strong anthropocentric ethic dictates the satisfaction only of interests constructed from unquestioned felt preferences, all values countenanced by such an ethic come from the satisfaction of these direct type of preferences. A weak anthropocentric ethic on the other hand dictates to satisfy interests constructed also by felt preferences which, however, have been put against the ruler of our adopted worldview and being adjusted if necessary, becoming considered preferences in this way. Values endorsed by such an ethic can then be explained by reference to satisfaction of certain felt preferences or by reference to the affects upon the ideals endorsed in a worldview, a worldview essential to determination of considered preferences. (Ibid)

The strength of such a weak anthropocentric ethic is that the rationally adopted worldview provides a basis for criticizing values based on felt preferences, for example preferences which are purely exploitative of nature. Strong anthropocentrism lacks such a mechanism. (Ibid) We could, Norton suggests, adopt a worldview in which the close relationship between the human species and other living things is emphasized, which can give us ideals of human beings living in harmony with nature. Such a worldview would give us a moral framework for developing powerful reasons for protecting nature. Such a theory would not commit us to the ontologically troublesome business of attributing intrinsic values to non-human entities. (P167) Norton admits that he shares with nonanthropocentrists the belief that "there are values distinct from human preference satisfaction" rejecting thereby that ideals can be reduced to preferences. They differ however on "whether the justification of those ideals must appeal to the intrinsic value of nonhuman objects"; The strength of weak anthropocentrism is that it avoids such "radical, difficult-to-justify claims about non-human objects".(Ibid)

Having settled this, Norton goes on to argue that a proper environmental ethic needs to be non-individualistic. Ethical questions about the environment can be divided into questions about distributional fairness withing generations and questions about distributional fairness across generations, generations that do not exist at this moment. (P168) He refers to the problem of non-identity stated by Derek Parfit to show that moral rules about distributional fairness across generations cannot be derived from individualistic

systems of ethics because as Parfit shows, our actions in the present are decisive for which people will be born in the future. Any ethics based solely on the principle that actions can only be bad if directed at some identified individual will not do with respect to obligations across (indefinite) time. (Ibid)

The last part of the article Norton spends on laying out a proposal for an adequate environmental ethic that is weakly anthropocentric and non-individualistic. Because this does not concern the main purpose of his article I will not go deeper into it here.

Why is Norton so keen to avoid the attribution of intrinsic value to non-human beings? I believe this comes from a certain reading of nonanthropocentrism which is highly impractical and leads to impossible moral conclusions. For such a strong reading of nonanthropocentrism, as Plumwood (1996) nicely puts it “we must distribute our preferences with perfect impartiality of consideration across humans and non-humans alike, to achieve a view from nowhere, which abandons all specifically human viewpoints on, or preferences about, the world.” (P10) This is of course impossible, such an ethic would be unrecognizable and highly impractical. In order to attribute intrinsic value to anything in such a nonanthropocentric view we must have knowledge of *what* is valuable and also *how* valuable on a cosmic scale in order to know how to act accordingly. However, the problems with such a *strong nonanthropocentrism* need not necessarily vindicate anthropocentrism.

What about a *weak nonanthropocentric ethic*? Consider the following example: In a thousand years from now, the earth is barren and the basic needs of all human beings are barely being met. One brilliant scientist however discovers a green planet which has water, oxygen and life on it comparable to life on earth. Moving humans to this planet B would improve human wellbeing enormously, however, the scientist decides not to tell anyone of her discovery on her return. Her main reason for this is that she knows how destructive human beings can be, and she would consider it a loss to have this planet be destroyed through human interference. Coming back on earth and having lied about the results of her mission, the scientist feels guilty to her family and fellow humans who are suffering from the situation on planet earth, however, she still believes that she made the morally right decision. And I think many people, whether or not they agree with her decision, would intuitively understand the moral reasoning grounding her decision.

In order to accept that the environmental ethic she based her moral decision on could be called weakly anthropocentric, we’d need to accept that a positive bearing upon ideals we hold as part of our worldview counts as a satisfaction of our *human* interests, even if that ideal dictates us to act against our obvious direct human interests. The rationally adopted worldview of this scientist in this case might then be called nonanthropocentric, while the ethic derived from that worldview would, in Norton’s view, be weakly anthropocentric because it satisfies her considered preferences. I however would like to propose to call such an environmental ethic weakly *nonanthropocentric*. *Nonanthropocentric* because it is obvious I think that the positive bearing of her decision upon ideals she holds as part of her worldview cannot seriously be counted as a satisfaction of human interests. Following from this, I think that it is fair to say that she attributes intrinsic value to Planet B which cannot be accounted for by any ethical theory that solely endorses value instrumental to the satisfaction of human interests. *Weakly nonanthropocentric* because the fact is that the moment she discovers planet B *she* has to make a moral decision how to act based on

her worldview. In this sense all our moral reasoning is anthropocentric because it can only be about what *we* know and the moral obligation *we* have and this kind of anthropocentrism is inevitable in any moral theory relevant to *our human* moral actions.

Is this anthropocentrism/nonanthropocentrism dichotomy then some sort of false opposition? No I don't think so, I think it is important to emphasize the nonanthropocentric aspect necessary for any adequate environmental ethic in order to understand that the values endorsed by such an ethic can also be explained by reference to the satisfaction of the interests of nonhuman beings.

Bibliography:

Plumwood, V. (1996). Androcentrism and Anthrocentrism: Parallels and Politics. *Ethics and the Environment*, 1(2), 119-152.

Callicott, J. Baird, 'Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again', in *Between the Species*, Vol.4, Issue 3, 1988, pp.163-69.

In this article Callicott wants to revise some of the hard claims he made in his earlier article "Animal Liberation: A Triangular affair." (1980) In that article he argues that environmental ethics is intrinsically at odds with Animal Ethics which are both incommensurable with anthropocentric ethics. Hence the triangle. In this triangle of supposedly opposing interests environmental ethics is defined by using Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic as the exemplary type while animal ethics is defined along Benthamic lines in which pain is taken to be the ultimate evil. (P311) The problem Callicott articulates is that environmental ethics is necessarily holistic in the sense that it treats the biotic community as its *summum bonum* and therefore creates obligations over and above self-interests, while animal ethics is necessarily individualistic in its essence, being focused on reducing suffering by individuals and doesn't concern itself with systems or species. Therefore both ethics are mutually exclusive forms of environmental ethics, resting upon very different theoretical foundations. (P315) The triangle is then completed once we see that both ethics are at the same time at odds with anthropocentric ethics which focuses solely on the well-being of human beings and considers only humans to be morally considerable.

In this article however Callicott has come to see that despite the problems between them, animal welfarists and environmental ethicists have a lot of "overlapping concerns". (1988, P163) He finds the division in his former article caused regrettable, because it would be much wiser to combine forces for the common goal of battling the destruction of the nonhuman world. (Ibid) He has become inspired by the attempts of other philosophers to reconcile the three positions such as the pluralistic approach of Mary Ann Warren who argues that the three ethics are indeed based on different foundations but should be seen as complementary not contradictory. She argues for an ethical eclecticism in which the moral rights of humans and animals have to be weighed against each other and against the environment which has no rights but is morally considerable. (Ibid)

Callicott has problems with such an eclecticism because "in moral philosophy when competing moral claims cannot be articulated in the same terms, they cannot be decisively compared and resolved. Ethical eclecticism leads, ... , to moral incommensurability in hard cases". (P164) Callicott strives for unity and argues that we should look for a moral theory that embraces both animal and environmental ethics and that provides a framework for resolving the conflicts that arises between "human welfare, animal welfare and ecological integrity". (Ibid)

For such a theory he lets himself be inspired by Mary Midgley and her book *Animals and Why They Matter* (1984) in which she grounds the moral considerability of animals in what she calls "the mixed community". Humans and animals have always lived together and so "the "species barrier" to human-animal social interaction is both artificial and unhistorical". (P165) Midgley does not develop a normative moral theory in her book, but Callicott thinks that, if pressed, she would sketch a Humean ethical theory, grounded in feelings, not reason. (Ibid)

Callicott claims that "Hume's moral theory is the historical ancestor of Aldo Leopold's land ethic", and thus Midgley's suggested animal welfare ethic and Leopold's environmental ethic "share a common, fundamentally Humean understanding of ethics as grounded in altruistic *feelings*. And they share a common ethical bridge between the human and non-human domains in the concept of *community*" respectively the "mixed community" and the "biotic community". (P166) The combination of these two conceptions of a metahuman community provides the basis of a unified animal-environmental ethical theory. So long as

animals are part of our mixed community we have special obligations to them as individuals; animals falling outside this mixed community should be considered as part of the biotic community and our obligation to them is with reference to our obligations as part of the biotic community. (Ibid).

Such a biosocial moral theory is able to overcome the problem adherent to utilitarian and deontological approaches to animal welfare ethics, of missing a “well-grounded distinction between our proper ethical relations with, on the one hand, domestic, and on the other, wild animals” it would not dictate humans to interfere with animal predation in order to diminish suffering. (P167) The biosocial paradigm Callicott argues for, endorses obligations grounded in various cooperating and competing ethics- each corresponding to our nested overlapping community entanglements. And in this way animal liberation and environmental ethics may be united in one unified moral framework, and even though they occasionally come into conflict, the frameworks provides “a means to assign priorities and relative weights and thus to resolve such conflicts in a systemic way”. (P169)

In a biosocial morality as envisioned by Callicott in this article our moral obligations to individual organisms and groups of organisms should be derived by reference to the relationships we have in both social and biological communities and should not be sought in intrinsic properties like sentience. Such a biosocial theory would have the virtue of recognizing moral obligations to both animate and non-animate things *and* to individuals as well as wholes.

However, as Warren argues in her book *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things* (2000) to base moral obligations solely on social and ecological relationships offers us no insight in how to weigh the various obligations arising from these relationships once they come into conflict with one another. (P133) And conflicts, as Midgley (1992) points out in “Beast vs Biosphere” inevitably will happen, no matter how carefully you will map out all the relationships that exist in and between existing communities. (P121) A moral theory based solely on communal relationships also gives no good reasons for the attribution of moral considerability to beings falling outside our communities, like possible extraterrestrial life (2000, P136) , neither does it provide reasons for moral action to rational beings with no empathy and little communal relationships.

Warren argues that the supposed simplicity of a uni-criterial theory (based on relationships in this case) is not an advantage and does not provide the simplicity we are striving for in our moral considerations. On the contrary, if we recognize the equal relevance of intrinsic properties in deciding what is morally considerable, this will make “a moral theory becomes less complicated in important respects”. (P136) Both obligations based on relationships and a rational desire to follow sound principles normally provide morally sound reasons for action. (Ibid)

I am very sympathetic towards Warren’s idea of a ‘Relationship Plus’ view of morality. (P123) However there is something that I miss in the above discussions about relationships and communities, which is that, even though a community is defined through relations, relations can also exist without communities. Relations tell us something about the *connections* between things. I do believe morality in its core is about relations. The one thing we know for sure, is that once there is a connection, and once we know that our actions will (possibly) influence the state of affairs of that with which we are connected, we need to consider if and how we ‘morally relate’ to that. And I believe it is the *nature* of the relations human beings

can have that provides the foundation of moral obligation. But there is not one nature of relations, not one simple way in which things can be connected, and thus there is also not one way in how our moral obligations are formed and how rules can be derived for coming to know our moral obligations. The nature of a relation might be based on empathy, found in the structure of a community, or found in shared psychological characteristics and the nature of a relationship might also be found in the fact that we are a part of a whole. There are probably many more types of connections we simply don't understand yet. I therefore believe that all (or most of) the efforts for trying to find *that one principle* that should guide our moral conduct, have actually resulted in an unraveling of some of the strands that define our moral obligations. The more of these strands we have been able to unravel, the more obvious it becomes that there is no simple principle underlying all morality. However the 'discovery' of those strands do give us valuable tools in our ongoing attempt to improve our moral reasoning and understand our moral obligations with respect to that with which we are connected

Bibliography:

Callicott, J. B. (1980). 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair', *Environmental Ethics*, Vol.2, pp.311-38

Midgley, M. (1984). *Animals and Why They Matter*. Athens: University of Georgia Press

Midgley, M. (1992). 'Beasts Versus the Biosphere?', *Environmental Values*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.113-21

Warren, M. (2000). The Concept of Moral Status. In *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*. : Oxford