ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE TWO

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND THE DOMAIN OF MORALITY

Introduction

In the last lecture we said that traditional western ethics has been accused of being too human chauvinistic to deal adequately with global environmental concerns. Traditional western ethical perspectives on the extent of our moral responsibilities are anthropocentric, and anthropocentric theories of environmental ethics include only humans as candidates for moral standing. In other words, they limit moral consideration to humans. However, in contrast to these shallow or light green positions in environmental ethics, deep positions would take the view that moral consideration should be extended to include at least nonhuman beings (with some arguing that it should be extended to include ecosystems). So there are disagreements about what should be given direct moral consideration. In the light of such disagreements, we would do well to think about the question of how far our moral obligations extend.

A being has moral standing if that being ought to be taken into consideration for itself (see lecture one). In this sense, beings that have moral standing are beings 'to whom principles of morality apply from, so to speak, the other end—from the standpoint not of the agent but of the "patient"' (Warnock, 1971, p.148, cited by Goodpaster, 1978, p.308). We may further enquire into the *criterion* for moral standing: 'What… is the condition of moral relevance? What is the condition of having a claim to be *considered* by rational agents to whom moral principles apply?' (Warnock, 1971, p.148, cited by Goodpaster, 1978, p.308). We will see that, in answer to these questions, a being has moral standing if that being has *interests* that we ought to take into account. A being has moral standing if it ought to be included among that class of entities that we normally consider to require consideration from a moral perspective, and such inclusion would require that it has interests which are morally relevant. Whether we do actually take its interests into consideration is a different matter.

Let us now turn to the question of what things have moral standing. Robin Attfield formulates the question as follows: 'What things count for something in morality, or matter in their own right? Which things, that is, merit moral consideration, and have moral standing in this sense?' (Attfield, 1995, p.8). The answer to these questions will be fundamental in deciding on how we should interact with the nonhuman world and its creatures.

In his article 'On Being Morally Considerable' (1978) Kenneth Goodpaster directly addresses these questions, and in doing so addresses the question about the moral considerability of the nonhuman world. In fact, he was the first to introduce the term

‘moral considerability’ (which just means ‘deserving moral consideration’). Goodpaster states:

> What are the requirements for ‘having standing’ in the moral sphere? However the question gets formulated, the thrust is in the direction of necessary and sufficient conditions on X in
> (1) For all A, X deserves consideration from A.
> where *A* ranges over rational moral agents and moral ‘consideration’ is construed broadly to include the most basic forms of practical respect (and is not restricted to ‘possession of rights’ by X) (Goodpaster, 1978, p.309).

What Goodpaster is basically saying here is that any enquiry into which things deserve moral consideration is essentially an enquiry into the necessary and sufficient conditions for moral considerability, where something’s deserving moral consideration is independent of whether that thing has rights—for something could have moral standing without it having rights or without anything about its having rights being held to follow.

Summary of stances

Essentially, in order to answer the question regarding which things have moral standing, we need to find the criterion for moral standing. Now, there are a number of different normative stances in environmental ethics and they differ as to what things they regard as having moral standing.

Anthropocentrism: we should, by now, be familiar with this term. Anthropocentrism is a normative stance that restricts the scope of morality to human beings; in other words, a thing needs to be human to have moral standing.

Sentientism: this normative stance is less restrictive than anthropocentrism. For sentientists, a thing needs to be sentient to have moral standing. ‘Sentient’ means capable of perception and feeling (for example, capable of pain and suffering).

Biocentrism: this stance is even less restrictive, and says that all living things have a good of their own and as such all have moral standing. This view then would include trees and other nonsentient things as beings that deserve moral considerability in their own right. It is individual living things that matter morally according to biocentrists, not systems.

Ecocentrism: this stance holds that systems have moral standing—here, we are talking about ecosystems, which are held to have a good which is independent of the individuals that exist in those ecosystems.

We will now have a look at these positions in a little more detail.

Sentientism

Peter Singer is well known for arguing that we should extend moral standing to all things that are capable of suffering. For Singer, moral consideration is limited to sentient beings,

so on his view it is only a minority of livings things that are included in the moral sphere. For a being to have interests it is necessary that it can suffer. Both humans and animals are capable of suffering. Because sentient animals are capable of suffering they do have interests, and if a being can suffer there can be no justification for not taking that suffering into account. Singer argues that our treatment of sentient animals is analogous to the racial and gender discrimination of the past, and he defines the mistreatment of animals in ways that it would be considered outrageous to treat humans as 'speciesism' (see Singer, 1998, pp.26-40).

Tom Regan is another well known philosopher who takes a sentientist stance. He says that the capacity to suffer, to feel pain and pleasure, and to be subject to frustration make a difference to the quality of our lives. Regan agrees with Singer that the pain and suffering of a being should be given moral consideration, but he does not think that the capacity to suffer is the only reason why nonhumans should not be treated as a mere means. For Regan, many sentient nonhuman beings are subjects of a life that can be affected for better or for worse, and, as such, have inherent value (Regan, 1998, p.51). (It is worthwhile noting that Regan attaches inherent value to individuals themselves, not to their experiences.)

Problems with sentientism

The sentientist position of Singer has been associated with 'animal welfarism', and as such the relations of environmentalism to animal-welfarism should be considered. J. Baird Callicott's paper 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair' (1980) presents animal-welfarism as fundamentally at odds with environmentalism. There certainly are some tensions. Many claim that animal welfarists have to explain why we should not intervene to prevent predation in nature. But the animal welfarist could provide good reasons for not interfering with predation. For a start, such inference would cause suffering, not alleviate it, not least because it would prevent animals from fulfilling their natural tendencies and potentials, and could easily result in some animals starving to death. This, in turn, would of course (to a certain extent) disrupt the ecological balance, which could have disastrous consequences for both animals and humans. Peter Singer suggests that, as far as wild animals are concerned, we should adopt a policy of non-interference ('except in a few very limited cases'), and should not attempt to 'police all of nature' (Singer, 1995, pp.225-26). But some sentientists think we should intervene (for example, Steve Sapontzis (1984)). Some environmentalists accuse animal welfarists of being ignorant with regard to how ecosystems function. But the healthy functioning of ecosystems can be recognised without ascribing intrinsic value to such systems, as ecocentrism does.

In spite of the tensions between animal welfarism and environmentalism, many people see sentientism as sufficient for an environmental ethic (see, for example, Dale Jamieson's 'Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic', 1998). If adopted, it would certainly require us to take into account the interests of sentient beings affected by our actions. It would also generate indirect obligations to preserve or at least conserve the habitats of sentient animals, as well as preserve the integrity of ecosystems for the good of sentient animals. However, it does have a narrow understanding of what is good and

bad, and should therefore, at best, be incorporated into an environmental ethics theory. We could plausibly argue that although sentience is sufficient for moral standing, it is not necessary. Consider people who lack the capacity to feel pain and pleasure, or who are not conscious subjects of a life. Perhaps they are in a coma or brain-damaged in some way—it seems that these people still deserve moral consideration, irrespective of their lack of sentience. And what about non-conscious things like trees and plants? They also seem to have interests and a good of their own which we can further or damage by our actions.

It should be said here that whilst there is much debate about which things have moral standing, it is generally agreed that whatever has interests is deserving of moral consideration and that, from a moral point of view, interests must be taken into account whenever those entities can be affected for better or for worse by the actions of an agent. However, while there is in general an agreement about the link between interests and morality, there is little agreement about which things can be said to have interests. So the question still remains as to the criterion for moral standing or for possession of interests.

For example, David DeGrazia takes a sentientist approach and argues that although sentient animals have interests, plants and trees do not, and as such what we do to the latter is not relevant from a moral point of view:

> It sounds fairly natural to speak of harm to a plant, but not to speak of its welfare. If the sentience requirement is right, while it might not be incorrect to speak of what is good or bad, beneficial or harmful, to plants and nonsentient animals, these terms are not correctly applied to these beings *in any sense relevant to morality* (DeGrazia, 1996, p.227).

On DeGrazia's sentientism, it follows that we can treat nonsentient beings as we please, since lacking sentience they also lack interests. For DeGrazia, while we may be able to speak of what is harmful to nonsentient things, we cannot say that such things have interests that should be taken into consideration. However, to say that plants and trees can be *harmed*, as DeGrazia does, suggests that they have at least some interests that we can further or damage by our actions.

Interests, beneficence and moral standing

What is the link between interests and moral standing? Why is it supposed that only being with interests have (or can have) moral standing? Well, from a moral point of view, entities with interests are entities can be affected for better or for worse by the actions of an agent. Indeed, Joel Feinberg suggests that to have interests a being must be capable of being harmed or benefited. A being that has no interests does not possess this capability. As he says, 'a being without interests is a being that is incapable of being harmed or benefited, having no good or "sake" of its own' Feinberg also suggests that only those things that have interests and a good of their own have moral standing (Feinberg, 1974, p.51). The following argument underlies Feinberg's claims:

> Premise 1: Only beings capable of being beneficiaries can deserve moral consideration.
> Premise 2: Only beings that have interests are capable of being beneficiaries.
> Conclusion: Therefore, only beings that have interests can deserve moral consideration. (This is Goodpaster interpretation of Feinberg's argument. See Goodpaster, 1978, p.318).

Goodpaster argues that Feinberg seems to believe that '"mere things" are incapable of being harmed or benefited' (Goodpaster, 1978, p.319) because they have no interests to take into account and no good of their own. Indeed, Feinberg does state that a 'mere thing… has no good of its own' (Feinberg, 1974, p.49). Now, Feinberg accepts that trees and plants 'are not "mere things"' and 'are capable of having a "good"', but he denies that they have interests (Feinberg, 1974, pp.51-52). However, this denial is paradoxical in the light of his view that interests belong to those beings capable of being harmed and benefited (or capable of having a good), and that mere things cannot be harmed or benefited (or have a good of their own). To overcome the paradox of his denial that trees and plants have interests, Feinberg also needs to deny that they are capable of having a good. While Feinberg is right to argue that plants are not mere things, this all but implies that they do have interests. Yet Feinberg denies such an implication.

However, many would argue that trees and plants do have interests, that is, they can be harmed or benefited by moral agents. They are not mere things, but living things, and as such they have certain interests. Goodpaster plausibly argues that Feinberg should accept the conclusion that all living things have interests, and therefore deserve moral consideration. Feinberg's criterion effectively commits him to this view but he rejects it (Goodpaster, 1978, p.319).

Admittedly, Feinberg goes on to talk restrictively about interests. He argues that interests belong to beings that have certain 'conative' characteristics, such as hopes, drives, goals, aims, desires, urges or impulses (Feinberg, 1974, p.49). Mere things, Feinberg claims, have no conative life and, as such, have no interests. A being then only has interests if it has aims, desires, wants, etc. This excludes 'mindless creatures' (Feinberg, 1978, p.53, cited by Goodpaster, 1978, p.319), like plants and trees. (This is obviously in tension with his claim that plants are not mere things; a claim that all but implies they do have interests.)

However, while it seems fair to say that trees do not have a mental life, Feinberg includes 'latent tendencies, direction of growth and natural fulfilments' as characteristics deemed sufficient for the possession of interests (Feinberg, 1974, p.49), and, as Robin Attfield has indicated, trees and nonsentient animals do have such characteristics, which suggests they do have interests (although Feinberg denies that they do) (Attfield, 1994, p.157).

Indeed, Feinberg's claims are quite contradictory. On the one hand he claims that the possession of certain capacities, including, for example, 'direction of growth', are sufficient for having interests, and that plants lack any characteristics deemed sufficient for the possession of interests. On the other hand he claims that plants have 'inherited biological propensities' and 'natural growth' (Feinberg, 1974, p.51). As mentioned

above, while trees and plants do not have a mental life, they do possess some of the characteristics that Feinberg believes are sufficient for having interests.

Moreover, Feinberg fails to notice that by excluding 'mindless creatures' from the moral sphere he is also excluding many nonhuman animals and some humans. However, all human and nonhuman beings need to be included if Feinberg is to be consistent, for all can be said to be capable of being harmed and benefited and, thus, all can be said to have interests. Feinberg goes on to suggest that the interests of plants are really human interests, and thus he gives plants an instrumental value.

But biocentrists argue that the interests of living non-conscious things, like trees, are the interests *of the living things themselves*. Trees maintain and heal themselves. They have the capacity for self-repair, growth and reproduction, and so it is hard to deny that they have interests. As Robin Attfield says,

> [A]ll individual animals and plants have interests… all have a direction of growth, and all can flourish… There is no need to hold that trees have unconscious goals to reach the conclusion that trees have interests… The growth and thriving of trees does not need to be regarded as a kind of wanting, nor trees as possible objects of sympathy, for us to recognise that they too have a good of their own (Attfield, 1994, p.157).

In saying that all individual animals and plants have interests, Attfield then goes beyond sentientism, and is firmly in the biocentrist camp.

Biocentrism

Goodpaster points out that there is an essential link between beneficence and morality. Those things that can be harmed or benefited will naturally deserve moral consideration. While living things are capable of being beneficiaries, inanimate objects, such as rocks, cannot be benefited or harmed, and so have no place in morality. Goodpaster, like Attfield, is a biocentrist, and claims that 'X's being a living thing is both necessary and sufficient for moral considerability' (Goodpaster, 1978, p.313). Goodpaster argues against sentientism, claiming that it is not just sentient beings that can be harmed. Of sentientists, such as Singer, he says

> [A]lthough I acknowledge and even applaud the conviction expressed by these philosophers that the capacity to suffer (or perhaps better, *sentience*) is sufficient for moral considerability, I fail to understand their reasons for thinking such a criterion necessary. To be sure, there are hints at reasons in each case. Warnock implies that nonsentient beings could not be proper "beneficiaries" of moral action. Singer seems to think that beyond sentience "there is nothing to take into account." And Frankena suggests that nonsentient beings simply do not provide us with moral reasons for respecting them unless it be potentiality for sentience. Yet it is so clear that there is something to take into account, something that is not merely "potential sentience" and which surely does qualify beings as beneficiaries and capable of harm—namely, *life*—that the hints provided seem to me to fall short of good reasons.

> Biologically, it appears that sentience is an adaptive characteristic of living organisms that provides them with a better capacity to anticipate, and so avoid, threats to life. This at least suggests… that the capacities to suffer and to enjoy are ancillary to something more important rather than tickets to considerability in their own right (Goodpaster, 1978, p.316).

For Goodpaster, then, while the capacity to suffer and experience pleasure may be sufficient for moral standing, it is not necessary. However, that a being can suffer may make that being's interests more morally significant or important than the interests of a being who lacks such a capacity.

Other biocentrist philosophers include Paul Taylor. Let us look at some of his claims:

> A life-centred system of environmental ethics is opposed to human-centred ones… From the perspective of a life-centred theory, we have prima facie moral obligations that are owed to wild plants and animals themselves as members of the Earth's biotic community. We are morally bound (other things beings equal) to protect or promote their good for *their* sake… Such obligations are due those livings things out of recognition of their inherent worth. They are entirely additional to and independent of the obligations we owe to our fellow human beings. Although many of the actions that fulfill one set of obligations will also fulfill the other, two different grounds of obligations are involved. Their well-being, as well as human well-being, is something to be realized *as an end in itself* (Taylor, 1998, p.72).
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> Rejecting the notion of human superiority entails its positive counterpart: the doctrine of species impartiality. One who accepts that doctrine regards all living things as possessing inherent worth—the *same* inherent worth, since no one species has been shown to be either "higher" or "lower" than any other… [I]nsofar as one thinks of a living things as possessing inherent worth, one considers it to be the appropriate object of the attitude of respect and believes that attitude to be the only fitting or suitable one for all moral agents to take toward it (Taylor, 1998, p.85).

Taylor can be described as a biocentric egalitarian. Like all other biocentrists he believes that all living individual entities have moral standing, but unlike many biocentrists he claims that all living things have the same inherent worth. So the biocentric part of his theory is the claim that living things are due moral consideration (inanimate objects are not). The egalitarian part is that all living beings are equal in having inherent worth (in saying that living things have inherent worth, he should be taken to mean that the good of living things is valuable in itself).

One problem with Taylor's egalitarian biocentrism is that it doesn't give us much scope for drawing distinctions between different beings when the interests of or duties to different beings conflict. For example, if water is scarce, and there is an option of giving a certain amount of water to a dying man or a dying plant, Taylor's egalitarianism, 'strictly interpreted', is indifferent with regards to which being we give the water (see Attfield, 2003, p.44). Note that this is a problem to do with Taylor's biocentrism, and does not apply to, say, Attfield's position because Attfield does not claim that all livings

things are equal in having inherent value. For Attfield, recognition of the moral standing of all living things is compatible with recognising that, when interests conflict, one being's interests may be more morally significant than another being's interests (Attfield, 2003, p.44). (We will talk about moral significance below.)

There is a reluctance to accept a biocentric viewpoint and see nonsentient things as having moral standing. Goodpaster suggests that this reluctance may be down to people's conception of the good (Goodpaster, 1978, p.321). If one's conception of morality or the good is essentially hedonistic, that is one views only pleasure as of intrinsic positive value and only suffering as of intrinsic negative value, one will recognise only sentient beings as capable of being beneficiaries and will not see nonsentient things as having any interests, and therefore as deserving of moral consideration.

Moral Significance

Goodpaster recognises that in cases of conflict the interests of, say, a tree will be overridden by the interests of a sentient being. But, importantly, he says that such cases point to the distinction between *moral standing and moral significance*. It may be the case that a human's interests override or be given more moral significance than, say, a tree's interests. But the reverse may also be the case, that is, in some instances the tree's interests should be given more moral significance than a human's interests.

> [Moral significance] aims at governing comparative judgments of moral 'weight' in cases of conflict. Whether a tree deserves moral consideration is a question that must be kept separate from the question of whether trees deserve more of less consideration than dogs, or dogs than human persons. We should not expect that the criterion for having 'moral standing' at all will be the same as the criterion for adjudicating competing claims to priority among beings that merit that standing (Goodpaster, 1978, p.311).

Attfield would agree that there is a difference between moral consideration and moral significance. He takes a capacities-based approach, arguing that in cases of conflict different capacities and interests should be weighted appropriately. It may well be the case that a being with greater capacities has more moral significance than one with lesser capacities where their interests conflict. He recognises the problems caused by Taylor's egalitarian approach and sees this approach as not properly accounting for the morally relevant differences between beings: 'Only when the different capacities and interests of different creatures are recognised to uphold differences of moral significance can a defensible and viable ethic be held' (Attfield, 2003, p.44).

Objections to biocentrism

Objection one
Why draw the boundary at life? Why not include rocks, rivers, etc.? Why not also include inanimate things like cars and machines? And if we accept the life criterion how far do our commitments extend?

Reply
The biocentrist may reply that our commitments extend to those beings that have a good of their own or interests, and that nonliving things do not have a good of their own or interests. The good of, say, machines is not an independent good, but the good of the users or manufacturers. Rocks and mountains also do not have a good of their own. Trees, however, do have a good of their own independent of the value ascribed by humans. Trees have interests and capacities similar to those things we consider to have moral standing. They have capacities for growth, self-repair, self-preservation, just as sentient beings do. There is then an analogous argument for holding that trees have moral standing. The interests of non-sentient trees lies in the flourishing of their capacities.

Objection two
There are a lot of disanalogies that can be made between conscious things and nonconscious things—trees have no feelings / desires. They are not interested in what we do to them, in the sense that they have thoughts.

Reply
One could reply that the disanalogies do not hinder the fact that non-conscious living things do have interests which make them candidates for moral consideration.
Paul Taylor says a similar thing:

> The idea of a being having a good of its own… does not entail that the being must… take an interest in what affects its life… It may… be… unaware that favourable and unfavourable events are taking place in its life. I take it that trees, for example, have no knowledge or desires or feelings. Yet is undoubtedly that case that trees can be harmed or benefited by our actions… We can crush their roots… We can see to it that they get adequate nourishment and moisture... Thus we can help or hinder them in the realization of their good (Taylor, 1998, p.72).

Rather than the disanalogies excluding such non-sentient things from having moral standing, they point to the moral significance of such things, not moral standing.

Attfield also argues that we can talk of what is in a being's interests or good, whether or not that being can take an interest in its life or reflect upon its own good. The good of living things lies in their flourishing in a way that is natural or distinctive to their species. And, as Taylor suggests above, that a living thing can thrive or flourish does not depend on that living thing being able to take an interest in its own life.

While the good of living entities in general could be seen in terms of their flourishing, the good of sentient creatures may best be seen in terms of their well-being. Indeed, Attfield argues that well-being and flourishing are 'states of affairs' that are independently or intrinsically valuable. Such states are good-in-themselves, rather than good-in-relation to other things. That is, the good, well-being or flourishing of living things is good or of value in itself.

Objection three

You cannot live properly if you accept biocentrism, for you would have to consider even the life of mosquitoes, bacteria, and grass. One would have to live by Albert Schweitzer's ethic of reverence for life. (Schweitzer was a biocentrist who argued that all life is sacred and should be treated as such.) One might also argue that it is not possible to consider all life.

Reply
One may reply to such an objection by pointing out the distinction between moral standing and moral significance. Plants and bacteria could have moral standing and, at the same time, have little moral significance.

Ecocentrism

Those who take an ecocentric view of environmental ethics hold that systems have value. They argue that if all life is taken as having moral standing then it is possible to include larger systems, like the biosphere as a whole, as having moral standing. Those who support this view hold that our own value as individuals is neutral until we explain how we contribute to systems. On this view, systems have moral standing and independent value. In the last lecture we looked at some philosophers who take this deep green position with respect to the environment. Arne Naess and Aldo Leopold are just two philosophers who are in the ecocentrist camp.

Ecocentrists tend to claim that their stance best supports preservation (of ecosystems, species, habitats, and biodiversity), and to claim that anthropocentrism supports nothing more than conservation (wide-use policies, such as maximum sustainable yield, grounded in a purely instrumental approach to natural entities). To this, Bryan Norton replies that there are a range of anthropocentric grounds for preservation, grounds scientific, cultural, recreational and spiritual (many of them non-instrumental), much strengthened by adequate consideration of future human interests. But all this ignores the strong case for heeding animal suffering and animal welfare, advanced both by Peter Singer and differently by Tom Regan. The principle of equal consideration of equal interests, applied to animals, would require us to be concerned about the individual welfare of nonhuman animals, both domestic and wild. (For Singer's argument for applying the principle of equality to animals, see Singer, '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).)

Consider…
Do you agree with this stance?
Do systems have value over and above beings as individuals?
Do we derive our value from systems?

Objections to ecocentrism

Biocentrism would resist the suggestion that systems have moral standing and independent value. On the biocentric view the good of an ecosystem consists in the good

of its members as individuals. Of course, those things that are of value do exist in the biosphere, and their existence does depend on the biosphere and its systems as a whole. But it does not follow that the biosphere and its systems are of intrinsic value. The biosphere and its systems have instrumental value in preserving its members.

Defenders of ecocentrism also support the view that species have intrinsic value and moral standing. However, the notion of a species is an abstract notion and a species does not have interests or intrinsic value. Rather it is the individual members of a species that have interests and the well-being or flourishing of individuals that has intrinsic value. Just as a crowd does not count as having moral standing because it is the individuals which make up the crowd that have moral standing, the same is true of a species group. What is wrong about eliminating a species is that it cuts off future members of that species, and future members of a species do, or rather would, have a good of their own and moral standing (Attfield, 1995, pp.24-25; and Attfield, 2003, p.40). Just as we have obligations regarding future humans, whoever they may be (that is, without knowing their identity (see Parfit, 1984, ch.16)), we also have obligations towards future creatures, whatever their identity may be.

Anthropocentrism

It should be noted, however, that some theorists working in the field see no need to develop new, non-anthropocentric theories. Instead, they advocate either weak or strong anthropocentrism. With regard to strong anthropocentrism, it is hardly an adequate theory on which to approach environmental problems. As Bryan Norton (himself a weak anthropocentrist) says,

> Strong anthropocentrism… takes unquestioned felt preferences of human individuals as determining value. Consequently, if humans have a strongly consumptive value system, then their "interests" (which are taken merely to be felt preferences) dictate that nature will be used in an exploitative manner (Norton, 1984, p.135).

In contrast, weak anthropocentrism takes into account 'the full range of human values not just economic ones' (Norton, 2008, p.10.) and 'recognizes that… preferences can be either rational or not' (Norton, 1984, p.135).

It is this latter form of anthropocentrism that Norton endorses. Human interests, on this view, are said to be sufficiently diverse to include an interest in protecting the environment and its nonhuman inhabitants. The nonhuman world is seen as a source of spiritual well-being and diversity. In this respect, weak anthropocentrism recognises that human interests are intimately connected to the interests of other things, including animal interests.

Evaulation of weak anthropocentrism

Norton also argues that weak anthropocentrism will advocate similar environmental practices and polices to nonanthropocentric theories (Norton, 1991, pp.237-43). It must be said that the problems facing humans will, most probably, be tackled by a sensitive

Norton-like theory. But, as Katie McShane claims, 'anthropocentrism… isn't primarily a claim about what actions and polices to adopt and why, but rather a claim about what has value and why' (2007). Indeed, if anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism do propose the same actions, then they will do so for different reasons. It is these reasons that will provide the defence for those actions, and, in turn, any defence given will be based upon claims as to what has value and moral standing: 'Claims about what has value and why are… the grounds for our claims about how to act' (McShane, 2007). Since it is not the case that only humans have interests, or that only human interests are important in the moral sphere, we should be wary of the implications and consequences of a theory that considers justifications for actions to be defensible only if they appeal to human interests. Weak anthropocentrism may propose actions that are right, but if the reasons given for those actions are discriminatory or unjustifiable then it is not sustainable as a theory that aims, in practice, to solve environmental problems. Indeed, it is likely that our discriminatory attitudes towards the nonhuman world are, at least partly, responsible for today's environmental problems. In the light of this, we would be prudent not to foster or promote such attitudes through application of a theory that values only human interests. McShane argues that, '[E]thics legitimately raises questions about how to feel, not just about which actions to take or which policies to adopt. From the point of view of norms of feeling, anthropocentrism has very different implications from nonanthropocentrism; it undermines some of the common attitudes… that people think it appropriate to take toward the natural world' (2007).

So it is not clear that weak anthropocentrism can provide sufficient protection for nonhuman species and the environment. On weak anthropocentrism, the nonhuman world is protected in so far as it promotes human interests. But species that are unidentified (for example, many species in the rainforests) cannot be said to promote human interests and, therefore, weak anthropocentrism provides no grounds for protecting undiscovered plant and animal life. Not only this, but if the majority of people do not care about certain habitats or animals, or feel that the protection of certain habitats or animals will not promote their interests, then, it is unlikely that weak anthropocentrism can provide sufficient grounds for protecting those animals and habitats (see Attfield, 2003, p.71).

After reading this lecture you should be familiar with the central debates in environmental ethics concerning the scope of morality, and in particular of the different normative stances relevant to environmental ethics and the various problems associated with such stances; an awareness of the kinds of things which we may have some responsibility to treat as if they matter in some way and for some reason; as well as an understanding of the link between interests and morality. After completing the reading and the exercises related to this lecture, read the boxed text on p.75 of Attfield's Environmental Ethics. This encourages you to form a view with regards to 'whether an ethic that is not anthropcocentric can motivate action, and whether it it possible to care about the good of non-human creatures'. It also encourages you to form a view 'on the range as well as the limits of environmentalist arguments based on human well-being alone' (Attfield, 2003, p.75).

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