



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment Coversheet & Feedback Form

[Please insert this coversheet as the first page of the assignment you are submitting]

For completion by the student:

Student Name: Katie Goring

Module code: HPPH 7009	Student University Number: 2023539	Educational support needs: No
Module title: Environmental Philosophy		
Module tutor: Dr Rebekah Humphreys		
Assignment title: Do species have a good of their own, and do they have moral standing as such? Provide support / reasons for your answer.		
Assignment due date: 19.08.22		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism.		
Name K Goring.....		

Assignment Mark

1 st Marker's Provisional mark	55
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

This is a satisfactory piece of work that, despite containing some inaccuracies, displays knowledge & understanding of relevant ideas, arguments & theories. More precision is needed in places, as is clarity of expression. The conclusion is weaker than it could be - this is because there are some gaps in the arguments & more detail is needed in order to make your case. But overall, this is an acceptable & informative piece of work.

Comments:

Marker 1 signature:

[Signature]

Date: 21/8/22

For completion by Marker 2 / Moderator:

Comments:

Marker 2 / Moderator signature:

Date:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant):

External Examiner signature:

Date:

Do species have a good of their own and do they have moral standing? ^{This is} A question that has only recently come to light in the world of philosophy and ethics. ^{or 'recognised'} A question that has sparked controversy and been the catalyst to new streams of thought. The animal rights and environmental ethic movement have been propelled into the forefront of discussions. In order to answer this question, we must first ask ourselves what does 'having a good of our own' mean? Secondly, what is moral standing and how can this be measured? And finally, who or what has a good of their own and do they have moral standing?

I will evaluate four main views, firstly, the traditional view anthropocentrism which puts human needs before everything else. Secondly, sentientism which is the belief that all sentient beings (human and nonhuman) have interests and deserve moral consideration. Thirdly, biocentrism, the belief that individual beings (both human and nonhuman) have a good of their own and have moral standing including non-sentient objects. Finally, ecocentrism; which is a holistic belief looking at wider biosystems as having value. All these stances attempt to define moral standing and as such, moral consideration, and argue to what degree moral standing should be extended to which species.

I will conclude this essay by arguing that all species do have a good of their own, however their moral standing as well as consideration differentiates dependent upon species, environment and situation.

Routley's Last Man analogy helps us to clarify the first part of my answer: what has a good of its own? The last man analogy asks the question, if there was only one man left on the planet, would there be anything morally wrong destroying vast proportions of the natural world? As there aren't any humans remaining, the actions will not cause harm or injustice to humans. Routley argues that it *would* be wrong, and most people agree. He believes this would be wrong as the living things he kills matter in a moral sense. (Routley, 1973) However, most traditional philosophical stances should in theory, not disagree with the last man analogy regarding the destruction of nature as they are human-centric and chauvinistic, i.e. putting the needs of humans before any other species. As most people do indeed disagree with the destruction of nature using the last man experimental thought, Routley has clearly shown us that there is value on nonhuman species (even when that value has no direct gain for humans). As most people do in fact disagree, Routley uses this to argue that there must be something incorrect or lacking with traditional thought. Routley's argument has been very influential and environmental ethics as a field has become much more important due to his input. Many more people have started thinking about the sorts of problems that Routley points out. Routley was one of the earliest environmental philosophers and his last person argument has been influential and has inspired people to look for other approaches to ethics.

Attfeld (1995) provides us with an additional thought when he adds to the last man thought experiment with the addition of the last tree. The last tree is able to reproduce if left alone. Attfeld asks the reader if the last man does wrong by chopping the last tree down. Again, most people agree and say yes, he does. Thus, the tree has intrinsic value, a good of its own and value and interests of its own.

These arguments clearly outline that species beyond humans have a good of their own. Plants are designed to optimise their water and nutritional intake, to flourish and reach the full potential. This alone proves that plants have a good of their own. Animals are sentient beings, that is they can feel and animals clearly have a good of their own. There is plenty of evidence for this argument, animals care for one another, can feel pain, need certain conditions to thrive and have interests to themselves and others. They migrate, reproduce and help to create a balance in the natural world.

Next, we can look at the difference between intrinsic and instrumental value to understand more clearly how species have value and in relation to what. Something intrinsically valuable is if it is valuable in itself and something is instrumentally valuable if it's valuable as a means to something else. These last man examples would suggest to many that actions can be wrong even if they do no harm to humans. As the last man destroys nothing of value to humans and we do consider him to act wrongly, then it is not true that only things that are of use to humans have value or that no action is wrong unless it harms some human being. The last man examples thereby further suggest that our moral concern should not be confined to humans alone.

Moral consideration is a way of saying that we are taking someone else's interests into account. This may or may not apply to different species depending on your stance, which we will evaluate later on. When one is given moral consideration, it means we have considered how they will be affected by our actions and/or omissions by our decisions and capacity. This essay is evaluating how far our moral consideration of species should reach. If you do not give species any moral consideration, you are effectively saying that you would cause them harm for amusement or your own gain (with no necessity). Understanding whether something has moral standing, and/or moral consideration is key to helping us understand the moral relationship between the human and nonhuman world. For something could have moral standing, but not necessarily moral consideration as not all species need or have interests in the same things. For example, should animals be given the same amount of moral consideration as humans? The majority of people eat animals (even though there is no nutritional benefit in doing so), therefore, they have no qualms with killing certain animals even though there is no gain or benefit in doing so. Animals do have moral standing. But are given far less moral consideration than humans in

although in some countries they do.
this case – they have been given a moral standing of a far less degree. However, this varies from species to species; humans wouldn't eat cats or pandas or other aesthetically pleasing animals and are therefore given a large degree of moral consideration (however wrong or right this may be).

The view highlighted above, where we put human interests before natural and animals, is the traditional anthropocentric view. Philosophers were predominantly interested in an anthropocentric view of the world. The natural world, fauna and flora, and their interests have only just recently come into consideration: Aristotle (1948) maintained that nature was made specifically for man's needs and that the value of nonhuman things in nature is merely instrumental, rather than intrinsic. This Aristotelian view persevered, and it wasn't until the 1960's and 70's that 'the effects that technology, industry, economic expansion and population growth were having on the environment' (Cochrane, 2007) were rippling through society and the awareness of these effects was increasing. Humans and our behaviours were under scrutiny for the first time. This growing awareness led to a new stream of philosophical thought throwing out the traditional anthropocentric philosophical view and putting the natural world in its entirety into consideration. There were two main books that had a profound effect on the increase of this awareness, firstly, Rachel Carson's (1963) *Silent Spring* and secondly, Paul Ehrlich's (1968) *The Population Bomb*. Both books alerted readers of the realities that human behaviour was having on nature whether via the use of pesticides or the increasing population numbers.

Following this, 'Environmental ethics was founded as a philosophical discipline in the early 1970s, with essays advocating a new approach to ethics from the Australian Richard Routley, [and] the Norwegian Arne Naess' (Attfield, 2014, p.63). We have already looked at Routley's last man thought experiment to help us understand whether a species has moral standing, and consideration and we will visit Naess' shallow and deep ecology theory a little later on.

Firstly, we will discuss the rise of sentientism. Peter Singer, a utilitarian and widely influential philosopher was at the forefront of the movement in our moral obligation to consider animals as deserving of rights. In 'All Animals are Equal', written in 1974, Singer urges the reader 'to advocate that we make this mental switch in respect of our attitudes and practices towards a very large group of beings: members of species other than our own—or, as we popularly though misleadingly call them, animals... I am urging that we extend to other species the basic principle of equality that most of us recognize should be extended to all members of our own species.' (Singer 1998)

~~not correct~~
Singer (1998) argued that all sentient beings had rights and deserved moral consideration. The rights and consideration would vary by the limitations and/or abilities of specific species, for example, a pig does not need the right to vote, however a pig can feel pain and can suffer therefore its right to life should be preserved. The sentience view does not widen to plants, just animals, although there is now more discussion that plants can indeed feel pain and suffering in a similar way to animals and humans. Hamilton & McBayer (2020) evaluate the empirical evidence of plant minds using examples of the Venus flytrap and the touch-me-not who react to touch and have even shown evidence of counting (Trewavas 2016) and learning (Gagliano et al 2014). They also look at the anatomy and physiology of plants and their similarity with sentient beings and, although they acknowledge some similarities, or indeed some different but valid ways in which plants may have some sort of nervous system or brain-like feature, they conclude 'that there is no evidence that plants have minds in the sense relevant for morality' (Hamilton & McBayer, 2020. P71).

Peter Wohlleben's 2016 worldwide bestseller, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, sparked attention to the notion that trees having feelings. Wohlleben's book describes how trees can love, worry about the future, feel pain and thirst and fear (Wohlleben 2015). Wohlleben concludes, that by understanding the emotional needs of trees and can then amend our treatment towards trees. Kingsland (2008) provides an evaluation of the book citing the controversy and outburst from the scientific world to Wohlleben's claims. However, the book did have some success in opening a new dialogue into the hidden life of trees and what their interests are and how (or indeed should) their interests should be protected.

Another sentientist is Tom Regan who believes that nonhuman sentient beings are able to have a better or worse life and therefore has inherent value (Regan 1998). Like Singer, Regan acknowledges that the ability to feel pain or suffering means that being should have moral considerations, however he believes that it is the effects of the pain and/or suffering which propel its moral consideration further. DeGrazia (1996), like Regan and Singer, agree that only animals (sentient beings) deserve moral consideration as they have interests. Plants and trees do not have interests and we are therefore able to use them and treat however we wish. As described above, it is clear that plants do have interests, both to themselves and also humans by providing clear air, material, nutrients, food and so on. The sentientist stance is a start, but does not go far enough by ruling out a huge part of the planetary system of which we depend on to live.

Biocentrism is the life-centred view which believes that humans have an ethical responsibility to not cause premature extinction of any species. They believe that every organism has an inherent right to survive, and that species can have a potential for human use and that every organism is capable through evolution of adapting to changing environmental conditions. Biocentrism looks at species from an individualistic stance. One biocentrist is Goodpaster. Goodpaster (1978) argues against sentientism claiming that more than just sentient beings can be harmed. Therefore, it is necessary to

Biocentrism - more individualistic say you have a tree

Not necessarily. Are you confusing reverence for life with one life-based theory

consider more than just the feelings of pain or suffering when looking at what deserves our moral consideration. For example, plants can be harmed although they may not be able to communicate their pain, if a tree is chopped down, or we redirect its water supply to feed something else, that tree will die and there are consequences to our actions. Goodpaster does however note that not all things deserving of moral consideration will be equal, some may have more moral significance than others, and indeed sentient beings could overrule the needs of non-sentient things (and vice versa). This takes us back to the difference between having moral standing, and moral significance, as Attfield would agree. Attfield considers different species as requiring different levels of moral considerations. '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). Unlike Goodpaster and Attfield, Taylor (1998) suggests that all living individuals (whether human or nonhuman) have the same value and are all equal. Their [all living entities] well-being, as well as human well-being, is something to be realized as an end in itself' (Taylor, 1998, p.72) and describes humans as being 'morally bound (other things beings equal) to protect or promote their good for *their sake*' (Taylor, 1998, p.72). This radical view is not taken on by many due to the impracticalities of such a claim.

Now we move on from Biocentrism to Ecocentrism. Ecocentrism is the belief that if the nonhuman world has moral standing, and that the larger systems must also have moral standing. The individual value is only as far as it is useful to the larger system. They are devoted to preserving the totality of Earth's biodiversity and the functioning of its life-supporting systems. We should not only preserve individual organisms but a species in a functioning ecosystem.

We mentioned Naess and his importance earlier. In 1973 Naess set out to define the 'shallow' and 'deep' environmental positions, i.e., how the human and nonhuman world are relatable in the paper, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement'. Naess coined both terms shallow and deep ecology. He describes the 'shallow, [as] presently rather powerful movement, and a deep, but less influential movement' (Naess, p.95). The shallow ecology movement is described as the 'Fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries.' This named 'shallow' for its 'surface level' view on ecology that represents a motion that is all very well and good, and has a lot of traction, but one that doesn't look into the deep-rooted causes and theories as it could (and should). It is mainly focused on recycling, pollution and other important but not forward or deep-thinking environmental issues. It is also western-centric and fails to take into consideration the wider geography outside of the developed world.

On the other side, the deep ecology movement represents a deeper level of reasoning, understanding and framework. Deep ecology believes that all living things are equal and deserve equality, no matter their species, and that society can and should be run on a local level, with a wide, holistic perspective to increase individual self-worth and eradicate a hierarchal system which does not consider all species.

Naess' view considered not only the individuals, but the larger systems and how they are connected and what moral standing they have. His views go even further than the biocentric view. Similarly, In 1979 James Lovelock proposed that all living things on Earth functioned as one superorganism that changes its environment and creates conditions that best meet its needs with the ability to self-regulate critical systems needed to sustain life. Again, stating that systems have a good of their own and have moral standing.

Aldo Leopold (1998) developed what he called the land ethic as a way to understand our ethical relationship with nature. Many philosophers doing environmental ethics take either an individualistic approach or a holistic approach as described. The land ethic, like Naess and Lovelock, is holistic so rather than focusing on how individuals should be treated, the land ethic focuses on how we should morally consider biotic communities or entire ecosystems. Entire ecosystems themselves have intrinsic moral worth according to the land ethic. As a young boy, Leopold witnessed the death of a wolf. When Leopold saw the green fire die in the wolf's eyes he realised that without wolves there would be too many deer and this would cause the entire ecosystem to suffer. He believes that everything is interconnected and we must therefore consider the effects of our actions on entire ecosystems and not on an individual basis. Leopold thought that morality functions to make us cooperate so morality is about how we should act as members of a community. History and science show us that humans are members of the biotic community: the land. This is because ecosystems have a tremendous effect on how we live. We are an integral part of this community so for Leopold this community, the biotic community, should be regarded as a moral community. Since our behaviour is necessary for ecosystems to survive and thrive then we should act as good responsible members of the biotic community which involves treating it well not destroying it and not disrupting it. Leopold recommends that we should preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community.

In conclusion, taking these different stances into consideration, it is clear there are huge limitations to the anthropocentric approach. It has certainly been ^{shown} proven that all (animate) species have a good of their own, and by animate, I mean human, flora and fauna. It has also been ^{shown} proven that all species do have moral standing. To some extent inanimate objects such as sand on a beach do have intrinsic value too, and do to some extent deserve moral standing – consideration however,

perhaps not. However, it is clear that a dual individual and holistic approach needs to be taken into consideration and that moral consideration of each species, individual or collectively depends upon a number of factors.

- Aristotle. (1948) *Politics*. Barker E, translator. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Attfield, R. (2014) *Environmental Ethics*, second edn. Cambridge: Polity Press,
- Attfield, R. (1995) *Value, Obligation and Meta-ethics* Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Carson R. (1963). *Silent Spring*. London: Hamish Hamilton
- Cochrane, Alasdair. (2007) 'Environmental Ethics', in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [Available at: www.iep.utm.edu/envi-eth] (Accessed on 15/08/2022).
- DeGrazia, D. (1996) *Taking Animals Seriously: Mental Life and Moral Status* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ehrlich, P. R. (1968). *The population bomb*. New York, Ballantine Books.
- Gagliano, Monica, Michael Renton, Martial Depczynski, and Stefano Mancuso. 2014. *Experience teaches plants to learn faster and forget slower in environments where it matters*. *Oecologia* 175(1): 63–72.
- Goodpaster, K. (1978) 'On Being Morally Considerable', in *Journal of Philosophy*, 75.
- Hamilton, & McBrayer, J. (2020). *Do Plants Feel Pain? Disputatio*. Lisbon, Portugal, 12(56), 71–98. [https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2020-0003]
- Kingsland, S. E. (2018). 'Facts or Fairy Tales? Peter Wohlleben and the Hidden Life of Trees'. in *Bull Ecol Soc Am* 99(4):e01443. (Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/bes2.1443>) [Accessed 16/08/2022]
- Leopold, Aldo. (1998) 'The Land Ethic' [originally appeared in Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949], in *Environmental Philosophy: from animal rights to radical ecology*, eds. Zimmerman et al. New Jersey: Prentice Hall
- Lovelock, J. (1979) *Gaia, a new look at life on earth* Oxford University Press
- Naess, A. (1973) 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary' in *Inquiry*, 16, 1, p 95.100
- Regan, T. (1998) 'Animal Rights, Human Wrongs', in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman et al. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Routley, R. (1973). 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?', in *Proceedings of the World Congress of Philosophy*, No.1, Varna, Bulgaria, 1973, pp.205-10.
- Singer, Peter. (1998) '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.
- Trewavas, Anthony. (2016). *Plant intelligence: an overview*. *BioScience* 66(7): 542–51.
- Wohlleben, P. (2016). *The Hidden Life of Trees* HarperCollins Publishers

✓
Well laid out