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A PLURALISTIC HUMEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC: DEALING WITH THE INDIVIDUALISM–HOLISM PROBLEM

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ABSTRACT

A PLURALISTIC HUMEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC:
DEALING WITH THE INDIVIDUALISM–HOLISM PROBLEM

By

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Environmental ethicists often argue for ethical holism, granting moral standing to ecosystems and species. However, this conflicts with traditional ethics and commonsense which attribute moral standing to individual organisms based on characteristics wholes do not possess, such as sentience or autonomy. Despite the apparent inconsistencies between these two approaches, any acceptable holistic environmental ethic must account also for these individual-oriented convictions. This is the individualism–holism problem. Marry Anne Warren and J. Baird Callicott have each offered solutions which they claim are monistic in that they provide a single systematic approach which can generate one right answer to each moral dilemma. I synthesize their views and reinterpret them as a pluralistic Humean environmental ethic, one which ameliorates but cannot fully eliminate the conflict.

Warren proposes a number of moral principles reflecting multiple sources of value which confer moral standing to both individuals and wholes. This, she argues, avoids the need for both higher level theories, which engender problematic conflicts between individualism and holism, and pluralism, which comes dangerously close to relativism. Callicott develops a community model in which the moral standing of various entities, and the strength of our corresponding obligations, is determined by their roles

within nested circles of communities. His work builds on both Hume and Aldo Leopold by arguing that our increased ecological awareness should inform our sentiments in ways that incline us to include ecosystems and their constituent parts in our moral community. Warren's principles—revised here in light of my contention that interests play the central role in determining the moral standing of individual organisms—provide substance to Callicott's otherwise more abstract approach. Callicott's work, in turn, provides theoretical coherence for Warren's principles.

Humean sentimentalism, however, is open to the charge of relativism, especially since Hume's appeal to universal agreement on central moral values and beliefs cannot be sustained in a world so obviously diverse. I respond by arguing that Humean sentimentalism can be reinterpreted pluralistically. Differences in experience and culture prevent universal agreement, but the common experience of living as humans in this world, with its particularities, limits the range of acceptable alternatives. Furthermore, because reason informs sentiment, there are grounds for critically assessing Humean moral claims.

Despite Callicott's and Warren's rejection of pluralism, I argue that in making room for difference, their views become more consistent with the Humean insight that ethics exists only in the context of experience. A pluralistic approach to moral reasoning provides an alternative to the continuing theoretical and practical stalemate between individualists and holists. It allows room for both sets of concerns in theory building and encourages compromise as a morally justifiable, not simply a politically efficacious, solution to practical dilemmas. Choices may have ethical remainders, but neither side of a debate can so easily insist that compromise threatens their moral integrity.

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There are several people without whom this project would not have been undertaken, much less completed. I owe a deep gratitude to all of them and wish to mention a few of them here.

Before beginning my graduate student career, I was torn between working in biology and ecology or in philosophy and religious studies. Two professors at Oregon State University—Peter List and Marcus Borg—showed me how to bring my interests together by introducing me, as a young graduate student, to environmental ethics. For that I will be forever grateful.

In my subsequent seven years of study at Michigan State University, no one has been more patient, more helpful, and more influential than my dissertation chair, Prof. Fred Gifford. Among other things, he forced me to think critically about my intuitions regarding nature and nonhuman animals. I am also indebted to Prof. Martin Benjamin, who has shaped my thinking about moral theory in ways I would never have guessed. He introduced me to, and finally convinced me of, the virtues of moral pluralism. Many others at Michigan State have also provided me with guidance, served as examples of excellence in teaching and research, and encouraged my work. Among them are Prof. Steve Esquith, Prof. Richard Hall, Prof. Robert Pennock, and Dean Wendy Wilkins. I also owe a thanks to the many fellow graduate students, friends, and undergraduates (too numerous to mention by name) who constantly stimulated my thinking about nature and ethics.

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CHAPTER 1

PLURALISM AND THE INDIVIDUALISM–HOLISM PROBLEM

Introduction

Environmental thought in America has developed through several, sometimes interweaving strands: the Judeo-Christian stewardship tradition emphasizing care of God's creation, the nature mysticism and aestheticism of the likes of John Muir, and the utilitarianism or "wise-use" approach of Gifford Pinchot's Forest Service, among others. This diversity has been drastically narrowed in the relatively young field of academic environmental ethics in what has sometimes appeared as a discipline-wide consensus that we are in need of a "new ethic" to replace the overly anthropocentric and individualistic thrust of Western ethics.[1] It is claimed that extensions of traditional codes of ethics governing human-human relationships are unable to justify the desired level of protection of nature. The proposed alternative is *ecocentrism*, or *environmental holism*, in which ecosystems, rather than their individual constituent parts, have intrinsic value and hence moral standing. In J. Baird Callicott's words, "nothing less than a sweeping philosophical overhaul—not just of ethics, but of the whole Western world view—is mandated"; ecosystems are to be the "locus of intrinsic value."[2] Aldo Leopold's injunction to evaluate actions according to the extent to which they protect the "integrity,

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[1]See for example: Richard Sylvan (Routley), "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?" *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 12-21.

[2]J. Baird Callicott, "Introduction: The Real Work." *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1989), 3.

stability, and beauty of the biotic community,"[3] is the often cited mantra of contemporary holistic environmental ethics.

A growing number of authors have more recently, however, been calling for a second major shift in how philosophers should think about the environmental. On their view, the single-minded focus on environmental holism[4] has left academic theorists isolated from those working to solve problems "on the ground." Rather than spending all of our effort trying to develop the single right version of holism and defending it against individualism, we should make room for diverging beliefs and competing values. In order to maximize our effect on policy, this should involve focusing on those views which already enjoy currency in public debates—perhaps traditional individualistic and anthropocentric approaches.[5] The search for the one right version of holism regarding ecologically complex entities, has done little to further solutions to real world problems.[6] Holism has so far not captured the public's imagination, and environmental activists continue to operate with a wide range of arguments (including holism) in support of their cause, largely ignoring the work of academic philosophers.

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[3]Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford U P, 1987), 224-25.

[4]"Environmental holism," or "ecocentrism," refers to an eco-centered approach to ethics. It can be contrasted both with "anthropocentrism" (or "homocentrism"), which refers to *human-centered* ethics, and with "biocentrism," which refers to *life-centered* ethics concerned with the moral standing of all individual living organisms.

[5]Anthropocentrism is usually assumed to be individualistic since it is "human-centered," and most Western human-centered ethics are in fact individualistic. However, it is possible to have a human-centered holistic ethic if human groups (perhaps cultures) are taken to be the primary locus of moral value.

[6]See, for example: Andrew Light and Eric Katz, "Introduction: Environmental Pragmatism and Environmental Ethics as Contested Terrain," *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London: Routledge, 1996), 1-18; and Andrew Light, "Taking Environmental Ethics Public," *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. D. Schmidtz and E. Willott (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2002), 556-66.

The new voices in environmental ethics are correct that the single-minded focus on a holistic approach has limited the discipline's impact on public policy and behavior. This is largely because it fails to resonate with already held individualistic views and, relatedly, because it leads to counterintuitive advice in cases where individuals and wholes conflict. Holistic views are notoriously inept at accounting for the moral standing, or moral considerability, of individuals. Positing standing for objects such as ecosystems makes it difficult to account for the commonsense view that individual people and nonhuman animals not only matter also, but perhaps matter most significantly. Individual entities and wholes such as ecosystems seem too different in kind for a single theory to cover both. Nevertheless, many of us want both: individual humans and animals do count morally, as do ecosystems and species. Mark Sagoff points out the difficulty of this position: "The [holistic] environmentalist would sacrifice the lives of individual creatures to preserve the authenticity, integrity and complexity of ecological systems. The [animal] liberationist . . . must be willing, in principle, to sacrifice the authenticity, integrity and complexity of ecosystems to protect the rights, or guard the lives, of animals."[7] Tom Regan, defending rights for animals, goes so far as to call thorough-going environmental holism "environmental fascism" due to its allowing for the sacrifice of individuals to further the good of ecosystems—on the holistic account, humans have no more standing than do any other member of the biotic "team."[8] The

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[7]Mark Sagoff, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce," *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993) 90.

[8]Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: U California P, 1983), 361-63. Regan admits that things such as ecosystems might possess value that is not reducible to the stuff rights are concerned to protect—namely interests—but claims that rights protect individuals in ways that cannot be overcome by concerns not tied to rights. Rights outweigh other concerns, and ecosystems and species cannot have

problem for holists who think that individuals count too is, then, not merely of developing a system locating moral worth in wholes, but of explaining how it is that individual people and animals can nevertheless also enjoy acceptable levels of moral considerability. A similar problem exists for individualists who think also that ecosystems and species are morally considerable.

In light of the *prima facie* theoretical inconsistency between individualism and holism, one might reason that because (i) two inconsistent theories cannot both be right, (ii) the aim of environmental ethics is to develop ways of understanding which will justify high levels of protection for ecosystems or species, and (iii) individualistic accounts seem to fall short of this goal, then (iv) the correct theoretical approach is not only holism, but a *monistic holism*: the moral considerability of ecosystems and species is to be accounted for by a single, unifying theory focusing on wholes. The individualist could reason similarly to a monistic individualism. Rather than arguing for one or the other monistic theory, I will argue for a *pluralistic* account which makes room for both holistic and individualistic elements, despite their seeming inconsistency. This means, though, that in cases where these elements conflict there will not always be a single correct answer demanding our compliance. Ethical pluralism, as I am using the term, refers to the belief that there exists, as Susan Wolf puts it, "pockets of indeterminancy" in moral reasoning: "No principle or decision procedure exists that can guarantee a unique and determinate answer to every moral question involving a choice among different fundamental moral values or principles."[9] This indeterminancy is due to rationally

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(though individual trees might have) rights.

[9]Susan Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism," *Ethics* 102.4 (1992): 785 and 788.

irreducible difference with respect to moral principles, values, beliefs, theories, and the like. In the case at hand, there may be irresolvable conflicts among our beliefs regarding the interests or well-being of various individuals and wholes.

Unfortunately, because it suggests the possibility of more than one acceptable theory or set of principles, values, and the like, pluralism faces serious challenges. J. Baird Callicott worries, for instance, that it will fail to provide guidance for action because multiple resolutions to particular moral dilemmas will be the rule rather than, as in a monistic account, the exception.[10] Relatedly, it will seem overly relativistic for some if it turns out that there is not only a plurality of principles and evaluations of particular cases, but no covering-theory determining when to be individualistic and when to be holistic, when to apply this set of principles as opposed to that, or how to weigh competing claims. If these concerns can be answered, as I think they can, we may end up with a vision of ethics which will better account for inter- and intra-personal clashes of intuition and make compromise—and hence progress on real problems—more likely, as disputants more readily recognize the possibility that opposing views might be of equal moral legitimacy. If so, this will be of interest outside of environmental ethics as well.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I describe and defend my preferred version of ethical pluralism and say more about the individualism–holism conflict in environmental ethics. In Chapter Two, I explore what makes individual entities morally considerable. I reject life, moral agency, and autonomy in favor of interests as the most relevant property. In Chapter Three, I consider Mary Anne Warren's principle-based approach to solving the individualism-holism problem. She provides us with principles

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[10]J. Baird Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 12.2 (1990): 109 and 110.

based largely on different sources of value, such as sentience and closeness of relationships. Warren's work is noteworthy because she tries to account for our commonsense intuitions regarding both individuals and wholes without subscribing to pluralism and succumbing to the related worries of relativism. I suggest some revisions and a reordering of her principles to reflect the conclusions of Chapter Two and argue that something more is needed at a higher theoretical level. That something more is provided by Callicott's Humean concentric circles model discussed in the subsequent chapters. I also argue in these later chapters that this Humean model is best interpreted in pluralistic terms, thus implicating Warren's work in a pluralism she tries to avoid.

Following a brief discussion of John Muir's and Gifford Pinchot's competing accounts of the value and protection of ecosystems, Chapter Four considers more closely Callicott's concentric circle approach to environmental ethics, which builds upon Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" and David Hume's sentimentalist ethics. Like Warren, Callicott defends a monistic account of ethics which he thinks adequately justifies moral considerability to both individuals and wholes. I argue that Callicott's approach ends up, against his wishes, going too far in favoring individual humans and other entities over ecosystems. To bolster his view, I suggest that we see nonhuman nature not only as an object or collection of objects, but also as an element of our own self-conception or understanding. This has the effect of making nonhuman nature more significant in our moral community than Callicott's original version seems to allow. Because Callicott's work (as well as my friendly addition) is best interpreted in Humean terms, I conclude the chapter defending sentimentalist ethics against the charge of relativism. Chapter Five returns to the issue of pluralism and argues that Callicott's view, supplemented with

Warren-like principles, is best interpreted as a pluralistic ethic, due in particular to the incommensurability of the individualistic and holistic elements. Although I have recast both Warren's and Callicott's work, in the end I hope to have moved their project of accounting for both individualistic and holistic concerns and intuitions further ahead. Contrary to their stated wishes, however, this means that single correct answers to cases pitting individuals and wholes against one another will often be lacking.

Ethical Pluralism

A triad of considerations typically motivates the call for pluralism: an acknowledgment of *diversity* and the desire for both *tolerance* and the ability to *rationally criticize* competing views. Noting the vast diversity of moral values and beliefs in the world, pluralists object to the assumption of, for example, utilitarians and Kantians that there is a single correct answer to each moral dilemma.[11] They propose instead various conceptions of ethics which have in common the belief that more than one set of competing values, principles, theories, or judgments of particular cases can be morally legitimate, but nevertheless rationally evaluated, whether the conflict is between people or within a single person. This situation results from both the world being so complex and our knowledge so finite that we are incapable of decision, and the fact that some good and important values, such as mercy and justice, may be inconsistent (not mutually realizable) and incommensurable (not comparable on a single scale or reducible to a common denominator) with one another.

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[11]On my pluralistic interpretation of Callicott's and Warren's work, utilitarianism and Kantianism retain at least some of their explanatory and prescriptive roles in moral thinking. They cease being, however, all-encompassing, singly correct moral theories.

It is important to note that a "plurality" of views can figure into monistic theories in various ways as well without making them pluralistic in any interesting way. Kantians might be faced with the choice of either telling the truth or harming someone, as in the oft-cited example of having to decide whether or not to lie to the Gestapo about a Jewish person hiding in one's house. Utilitarians might admit that people have conflicting desires. And followers of W. D. Ross will argue for a non-rankable, often conflicting, set of prima facie moral principles. Nevertheless, these are all best described as monistic approaches, as they have in common the aim of eliminating difference with respect to evaluations of particular cases through the use of some unifying element. The categorical imperative for Kantians, the principle of utility for utilitarians, and the details of particular cases and our moral intuitions for Rossians, are supposed to provide one correct answer to each moral quandary. It is not clear, however, that each of these theories always succeeds in providing single correct answers. But if not, how is pluralism different from monism?

A distinction is helpful here. Monism refers to the belief that there is a single unifying theory or set of principles by which to evaluate particular situations. Absolutism is the belief that there is one right answer to each of these situations. Although they are not synonymous, these two concepts most often come as a pair. It is possible to have a monistic theory that leads to no determinate, or unique, answer to particular cases. In utilitarianism, for example, it is theoretically possible for two actions to result in the same amount of overall happiness or desire satisfaction, or at least for us to be unsure, due to the complexity of the world and our limited understanding, which act will lead to the best outcome. Generally, however, those who are monists are so because they are looking for

a systemized way of evaluating particular cases which will in fact result in one, unambiguous answer. Callicott, for one, is pushed towards monism not only by worries of theoretical consistency, but also by the concern that pluralism does not provide specific enough direction for action. The utilitarian can interpret even the case of two actions resulting in equal utility in absolutist ways: the one right answer in such a case is to choose one or the other act by flipping a coin or by some other random method; the obligation is to do at least one of these acts and doing one will leave no duty unfulfilled. As Susan Wolf suggests, "In such cases, it seems rational to be indifferent about which choice gets made—either decision would be (perfectly) fine."[12] In other cases, monists might take the existence of more than one "right" answer under a particular ethical theory as evidence not of rationally irreducible difference, but of the need for better theory or a redescription of the situation in question. On a pluralistic account, differences of view will not be so easily unified or reconciled.

It is unquestionable that there exists great diversity of beliefs, values, and commitments among people throughout the world. From a typical Western perspective, the outmoded Eskimo practice of killing normal healthy infants or putting their elderly out on the ice to die sounds horrific. The Hindu prohibition against killing cows even when people are underfed sounds odd at best. And the fundamentalist Islamic belief that women should not be heard, and barely seen, in public seems a clear violation of human dignity and rights. From a different perspective, the Western prohibition against eating horses and dogs, the insistence on individual freedom, and the never ending accumulation

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[12]Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism," 788. See also: Ruth Barcan Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77.3 (1980): 126.

of material goods must seem strange, or even immoral. Some differences are fairly specific, such as disagreements on the relative importance of freedom and equality; others are best described in terms of world views. Lives built around, for example, the general belief that good and evil are in constant flux and balance will differ substantially from those built around the belief that evil can and must be vanquished. The differences will be manifest in everything from attitudes regarding illness and death to understandings of predator-prey relationships in nature.

Some of these differences may not, upon reflection, be specifically moral in character,[13] but might instead merely reflect customs, manners, or culturally embedded preferences, as do, for example, expectations regarding gift giving and paying gratuity for various services. These sorts of differences do not pose particular challenges to us. Promise keeping, helping those in need, and treating others with respect are, however, primarily moral concerns. There is, of course, much disagreement about what makes a claim a moral claim. But whatever it turns out to be, one element is likely to be some sense of universality, or at least intended universality. Even in a pluralistic account, the claim that it is right to do x (or wrong to do x, as the case may be) is usually intended to mean that anyone in a similar enough situation would be right to do x, or one of the legitimate alternatives. All must act within limits of morally acceptable behavior, even though the alternatives may be mutually inconsistent.

The above examples of diverse beliefs and values are in one sense merely descriptive facts about the world—what John Rawls calls "the fact of pluralism as

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[13]I am using "ethics" and "morality" interchangeably.

such."[14] In another sense, phrases like "should not" and "violation of human dignity and rights" point also to the underlying prescriptive intent. How, though, could it be both morally acceptable and unacceptable to kill healthy infants, consume certain animals but not others, or oppress different people on account of their race or gender? What are we to make of this diversity when it involves claims that are, presumably, advanced as universal? One obvious choice is to dismiss this difference as the result of our human cognitive failings and to continue to look for the single correct set of moral truths. Under this view, at least one side of each dispute is mistaken, even if we are unsure which. A pragmatic pluralism might be in order here: because we are not (yet) sure who, in some disputes, is correct, we should allow for the possible legitimacy of each and seek compromise, flip a coin, or vote. An alternative is to claim that the legitimacy of moral norms and the systems of which they are a part are relative to particular cultures; to act morally *just means* acting according to the norms of one's society. The choice is between a unifying monism (with its corresponding tendency to absolutism) on the one hand, and cultural relativism on the other. Proponents of each camp might recognize the fact of diversity in the world with respect to moral values and beliefs, but differ in the extent to which they prefer either to be able to critically evaluate or to be tolerant of these views. The choice at this point is between the belief that there is a culturally transcendent evaluative schema and the belief that there are no such objective moral standards by which to evaluate culturally embedded moral claims.

Monism and relativism are each, however, plagued with problems. The monist is challenged to defend his or her particular ethical theory from counterexamples pointing to

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[14]John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia U P, 1993), 36.

the preferability of an alternative monistic ethic, as is commonly seen in the never-ending exchange between Kantians and utilitarians. They also must explain why it is that we seem as far as ever from finding a single, agreed-upon moral theory which yields or reflects acceptable commonsense evaluations of particular situations.[15] Furthermore, the notion of tolerance must be limited for monists. At most, it can involve a pragmatic acknowledgment of our uncertainty and a corresponding prohibition against forcing one's views upon (albeit, misguided) others. Alternatively, culturally relative differences might be dismissed as disagreements about things not specifically moral in character. Genuine tolerance, in the sense of acknowledging the legitimacy of competing views (even within a single person), is not an option for the monist.

In contrast, the ethical relativist will say that even distinctly moral claims are relative to groups, and that claims to universalism are false. Tolerance is, then, to be expected. However, cultural relativism, understood as the view that any standard of evaluating moral choices is culturally bound,[16] suffers from more objectionable problems

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[15]Utilitarians are particularly adept at responding to counter examples (e.g., that utilitarianism would require us to kill innocent people if this would maximize utility) by either reformulating utilitarianism itself (as in the shift from act to rule utilitarianism) or by redescribing the situation in question to show that utilitarianism would not in fact conflict with commonsense views. One could, for example, change the outcome of a utility calculation by changing the number of people whose interests are significant enough to be considered (perhaps by changing what "significant enough" means) or by altering the length of time over which an action's effects are to be measured. Too often, though, such solutions seem ad hoc—it is wrong to kill innocent people not because of utilitarian consequences, but because people matter in and of themselves. Utilitarians might argue that convicting innocent people for crimes in order to appease the public is wrong because this would not maximize utility—the fear it would cause among the population would outweigh any potential benefit. But even if this is true, it is only contingently so. Changing circumstances could justify or even require—contrary to commonsense views—the conviction of innocent people on utilitarian grounds.

[16]When I refer to "relativism" or to the "worry of relativism," I have in mind any extreme version of the claim that beliefs and values are relative to cultures such that there are no standards by which we can make cross cultural evaluations. There may be more moderate versions of relativism where many things are relative to cultures but where there will nonetheless be some means by which beliefs and actions can be critically appraised within and between groups. Presumably, even the utilitarian will find that many preferences are culturally relative. This need not mean, however, that there are no standards of

than does the typical monistic theory: it fails to make sense of moral progress, it leaves no room for praise of reformers, it raises serious questions regarding which groups get to count as the bearers of moral standards, and most importantly, it paralyzes our ability to rationally criticize practices such as spousal abuse or genocide done within the confines of a different culture. Furthermore, even the claimed virtue of tolerance is left without the grounding purported by some relativists: tolerance toward other cultures is the morally correct attitude only if one's culture happens to say it is so. *Individual* relativism can avoid the problem of which social groups get to count since the importance of cultures disappears as each individual becomes the locus of moral validity. But for this very reason, this version of relativism eliminates any hope of rational moral reasoning and criticism even within cultures.

Ethical pluralism, carefully constructed, is one way out of this impasse: we can acknowledge diversity while both acting with tolerance and retaining the means to rationally criticize divergent views. We can respect difference at the levels of evaluations of particular actions, principles, theories, and even worldviews while thinking there nonetheless exist some standards by which to evaluate such claims.[17] Good and important values, principles, and the like, sometimes (perhaps *often*) conflict in ways irresolvable by reason alone. Rawls calls this "reasonable pluralism" in contrast to the

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evaluation—the principle of utility would retain its critical edge. These more moderate versions of relativism pose no threat to either traditional ethical theories or to the Humean pluralism I am defending here.

[17]Notice, this is anti-monistic because it does not seek a single theory or set of principles by which to evaluate each case (or which reflects prior evaluations of cases), and it is anti-absolutist in that it anticipates more than one right answer to particular moral dilemmas.

mere "fact of pluralism as such."[18] The difficulty is describing pluralism in a way that allows for a range of possible views, yet sets limits of acceptability for this range, despite the fact that many of the legitimate possible views will be inconsistent or incommensurable.

Pluralists need not give up the notion of moral truth, but believe that, as Wolf puts it, "though there may be a moral truth, the truth will be more complicated than one might have wished—complicated, specifically, in such a way as to make the answers to certain questions indeterminate."[19] In this brief description can be found two different sources of, or perhaps even two different sorts of, moral pluralism—Wolf acknowledges that sometimes we are simply mistaken in our beliefs, but argues that this does not mean that always one of a set of competing views must be wrong.[20] An epistemological interpretation would claim that life is too complex and our knowledge too finite to always be able to determine single correct answers to moral quandaries. An ontological interpretation, on the other hand, would have it that sometimes single right answers are unavailable even in cases where our knowledge is complete. It is not always clear which is at play in any particular case, and in fact, both may be.

In his seminal defense of pluralism, Isaiah Berlin argues that it is not always due to our human insufficiencies that rationally irreducible conflict remains, but rather, it is

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[18]Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 36. I will use "diversity" (or some similar word) where Rawls uses "the fact of pluralism," to refer to the descriptive fact of the existence of diverse views and beliefs. I will stick with his term "reasonable pluralism" to refer to the *evaluation* of such differences as rationally irreducible, and will use "ethical pluralism" (or simply "pluralism") to refer to the meta-ethical position that there are no unifying, or monistic, theories or sets of principles by which we can order or unify all of the reasonable, or legitimate differences in order to generate singly correct answers to particular cases.

[19]Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism," 789.

[20]Ibid., 787.

because "not all the supreme values pursued by mankind now and in the past were necessarily compatible with one another." For him, a world of objective values exists, but these values often clash.[21] This suggests that Berlin thought of pluralism under the ontological interpretation since the incommensurability or incompatibility of values is evident with no claimed lack of knowledge. Without deciding here what exactly "moral truth" means, we can take pluralism to be roughly the view that good and important values sometimes conflict in rationally irreducible ways, for both the epistemological and ontological reasons, such that more than one right answer may exist for particular moral quandaries.[22] Moral pluralism thus does not imply that there are no wrong answers, nor that all the acceptable ones are equally so.[23]

Two clarifying comments are in order before proceeding further. First, rationally irreducible difference can occur among beliefs and values of different people or within the set held by a single person. In either case, the source of conflict may be epistemological or ontological. This means there could be difference between people due to their different experiences, psychological predispositions, and cultural settings which would be reducible if only our understanding were not so limited. Alternatively (though not necessarily exclusively so), these differences—again, perhaps due to different

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[21]Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 7-11.

[22]Moral truth means minimally that "X is morally right" has a truth value, or is not simply an assertion of personal preference or Kantian hypothetical imperative. The Humean account appealed to later naturalizes ethics, thereby taking out some of the mystery from the notion of moral claims being objectively true or false. For Hume, moral claims in such an account come from humans living human lives with particular needs and desires, and do not exist independent of moral agents' experiences.

[23]I am indebted to Martin Benjamin, who, in both class and private conversations, led me to this particular description of moral pluralism.

experiences, predispositions, and the like—may involve inconsistencies or incommensurabilities of equally good and important values not reducible even in light of all the relevant information. Similarly, beliefs and values within a single person may be at odds due to the inability to sort out the more from the less correct or desirable ones, or to their inherent incompatibility. It is likely that all four of these phenomena occur. In fact, the intra-personal pluralism (epistemological or ontological) is likely to provide some of the explanation for the existence of inter-personal pluralism. To the extent that each of us is unsure of, or comes to different understandings of, the proper arrangement or balance between mercy and justice, or freedom and equality, differences between people will likely arise. This would be especially the case between those who do not share cultural settings or experiences.

The second clarifying point has to do with the "levels" of moral thinking at which differences could generate pluralism. We might sometimes talk of pluralism as existing, or being located, at the level of world views, theories, principles, or the like. We may have, for instance, a variety of principles (both within and between people), unordered by a covering theory with which we can evaluate particular cases. This is an example of moral pluralism (or an *interesting* example) on my description only if this arrangement leads to diverse judgments about particular cases. Similarly, differences at the level of moral theory could lead to pluralism if this difference is rationally irreducible and would result in different judgments of particular cases, whether through divergent sets of principles or not. The source of pluralism could also be located right at the level of moral intuitions regarding particular cases quite independent of articulated principles or theory. Such difference would likely be traceable to (perhaps very unarticulated) differences of

worldview, religion, etc., which impact one's beliefs regarding, for example, sources of value in the world. Pluralism, then, could occur in various ways, have different sources, and can be both intra- or inter-personal.

Possible objections to pluralism include the claims that it is not well motivated or needed, and that it leads to unwanted consequences. I will discuss the following criticisms: (a) the argument in favor of pluralism from the existence of moral dilemmas is seriously flawed, (b) having not yet found the one right monistic moral theory does not mean that it does not exist, (c) diversity of moral beliefs and values can be accounted for without pluralism, and (d) pluralism leads to relativism.

It may be argued first that a major motivation for pluralism—the existence of moral dilemmas—is fatally flawed. "Moral dilemmas" refers here to rationally irresolvable moral conflicts where choosing any option means leaving the remaining option(s) wrongly undone. The existence of such conflicts, the pluralist claims, points to differences of values and beliefs that are unresolvable, or un-orderable, by a single unifying theory or set of principles. Others, though, have argued that such dilemmas cannot exist because we are obligated to do only that which it is possible to do, and it is impossible to do both of a pair of incompatible actions. Hence, this ground for moral pluralism looks blocked.

An example of a possible moral dilemma is suggested (though in the end, rejected) by Alan Donagan: In Judges 11, Jephthah promises to God that he will sacrifice the first living creature he sees upon returning from battle, but to his horror his daughter runs out to greet him before he sees any of his livestock. Jephthah realizes that he would be doing wrong whether he kills his daughter to fulfill a promise to God or refrains from

killing her, thereby breaking his promise to God.[24] Examples more common to our own lives include making (even in good faith) two promises only to find out that they cannot both be fulfilled. In such circumstances, choices, it is sometimes said, are not made without ethical remainder. This is the case not only when the choices are equal in moral importance, but also when one act seems to be more strongly required. Even in this latter case, failing to do at least one of the actions amounts to at least one of our duties remaining wrongly unfulfilled.

There as been much debate regarding the existence of moral dilemmas. Some take the guilt we often feel when we are unable to fulfill two jointly unfulfillable duties as confirmation of the existence of such dilemmas. Pluralists then sometimes use the existence of moral dilemmas as evidence against monistic theories since such theories typically promise (at least implicitly) single correct answers to moral quandaries. There are at least three options here: either (a) moral dilemmas exist and we should feel guilty, (b) moral dilemmas exist but we should not (or need not) feel guilty, or (c) moral dilemmas do not exist.

It has been suggested in favor of option (c) that exception clauses can be added to principles or that principles can be rank ordered to resolve any apparent dilemmas. Ruth Barcan Marcus rejects these two possibilities: "What is incredible in such solutions is the supposition that we could arrive at a complete set of rules, priorities, or qualifications which would, in every possible case, unequivocally mandate a single course of action."[25]

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[24]Alan Donagan, "Moral Dilemmas, Genuine and Spurious: A Comparative Anatomy," *Ethics* 104.1 (1993): 15-16. Donagan does not think that genuine moral dilemmas exist.

[25]Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency," 124.

Her reaction seems on target—it is unlikely that principles, much less the values the principles embody, such as liberty, equality, beneficence, and mercy, can be so neatly arranged or specifically tailored as to avoid what appear to be dilemmas. A second way of supporting option (c)'s rejection of moral dilemmas is to conclude that contradictory obligations are "an indispensable sign that a particular theory is defective," rather than a sign of actual moral dilemmas.[26] This, however, seems to be more of an assertion than an argument. There is no way, short of a monist theory eliminating what seem to be moral dilemmas, to know if the problem resides in the theories we construct or in the world. It is not clear that either side has the edge here, though the lack of an agreed upon order and further specification of principles, as well as the existence of feelings of guilt regardless of which option is chosen point to the existence of moral dilemmas.

The more serious objection to the argument from moral dilemmas to pluralism involves the philosophical adage that "ought implies can." We cannot be obligated to do the impossible, which in this case would be to fulfill two mutually exclusive or inconsistent duties. Therefore, any guilt we feel upon making a choice in such a situation is needless—we can *feel* guilty, but we are not *in fact* guilty of a wrong. I take this objection to be damaging. There are cases where we should feel guilty when we fail to uphold two mutually exclusive duties, but these are cases in which the dilemma exists because of some prior wrong we committed. This occurs when we, for example, knowingly promise both to our children to spend Saturday playing ball with them and to our boss that we will come into work that day. The wrong lies, however, not so much in our leaving undone something we were unable to do, but in promising to do something

[26]Donagan, "Moral Dilemmas, Genuine and Spurious: A Comparative Anatomy," 13.

we knew we could not do. In situations where we are confronted with, but are not responsible for, what appear to be dilemmas, the *ought implies can* adage suggests that if we do our best and fulfill the more weighty of the two duties, we are guilty of no wrong. In cases when the duties are equal in weight, we should use some fair (perhaps random) decision procedure to make the choice. In either case, although we might have a duty to do two acts individually, we do not have a duty to fulfill the conjoined duties if such would be impossible. In this way, they are like prima facie duties.[27]

The non-existence of faultless moral dilemmas, however, does not entail monism or absolutism. It may be true that moral dilemmas do not exist where this means that by doing only one of two (or more) mutually inconsistent actions, each of which is one's duty, one duty remains *wrongly* unfulfilled. Moral dilemmas of a more general sort, however, surely do exist and do suggest pluralism. Even if we cannot be held morally accountable for not fulfilling both of a pair of inconsistent duties, it may sometimes be that prior to a decision either option *would have been* the correct choice. Monism, or more precisely, the aim of absolutism which motivates monism, would have it that if this were the case, it would be the exception rather than the rule, and that problems with our theories would be to blame. A Kantian theory which tells us never to lie but always to protect the innocent should be altered to avoid leading to a dilemma. In contrast, the pluralist insists that rationally irreducible conflicts, both between people and within single persons, is a permanent and ubiquitous feature of our world. The existence of moral

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[27]It is true that commonsense morality would have us try to make amends to the party whose interests went unfulfilled due to our choosing the other of two options in an apparent dilemma. However, this is generally the case where we are, or might appear to be, at fault in the origin of the apparent dilemma. In other cases, the need to make amends is due to the general prescription to help those in need, especially those close to us, who usually happen to also be those most effected by our daily choices.

dilemmas of this more general sort (hereafter, "moral quandaries") is what the pluralist needs, not moral dilemmas in which there is the possibility of ethical remainder.

In summary, then, on the narrow view of moral dilemmas, option (c), which denies the existence of the dilemmas, seems correct. On the more general (and commonsense) definition of moral dilemmas (what we are now calling "moral quandaries"), option (a) is correct when the situation is due to our own wrongdoing, and option (b) is correct when we are blameless—guilt is an appropriate response when, and only when, a moral dilemma exists due to some fault of our own. Eliminating moral dilemmas in the narrow sense does not, I have argued, pose a problem for the necessity of pluralism, while the existence of moral quandaries *is* a strike against moral monism.

A second complaint regarding the lack of motivation for pluralism points out that the fact that we have not yet found the one right monistic theory does not entail its nonexistence. No human knowledge is complete; perhaps we have not yet been clever enough or worked hard enough to find what we are looking for. This may well be the case, but given the inability thus far of any particular monistic approach to win the day, we should at least explore the option of pluralism. The monistic theories most widely accepted contain many important insights, and any pluralistic theory ought to take seriously what we have learned from the likes of Kantian, utilitarian, religious, and care ethics, recognizing, however, that there are many inconsistencies between them. Of course, we should seek theoretical consistency where possible, and it might end up that a monistic theory will emerge through the struggle to arrive at a coherent pluralistic account as the inconsistencies are worked out; pluralism would turn out to have arisen from epistemological and not ontological sources. But aiming specifically to reduce all

difference to a single unifying theory has so far been a dead end.

One might object additionally that pluralism is not needed because diversity can be accepted in monistic theories without always resorting to the claim that at least one of a set of competing views is wrong. In a different context, Rachels argues that it often only appears that moral views diverge across cultures. The contexts in which people live and differences in non-moral beliefs are the cause of this illusion. Eskimo infanticide, for example, looks much less inconsistent with Western moral views once we note the harshness of their environment and real difficulty of providing enough food for additional children. Eskimo people do not in fact care less for each other or think less of human life and suffering. Similarly, the Hindu prohibition against killing and eating cows makes moral sense from any perspective once it is realized that for them these cows may be reincarnated relatives.[28] Pluralism, then, is not needed—moral differences are reducible to religious, metaphysical, or situational differences.

Rachels appears to be largely right about these cases, but it seems likely that there are others that involve differences not so easily reducible. Consider for instance Berlin's examples of freedom and equality, and Roman vs. Christian virtues. In the first case, we are faced with conflict between two primary values, and as such, our worries about how to balance them cannot, on the face of it, be reducible to simpler elements. Furthermore, conflicts regarding primary values such as these can occur within a single person,

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[28]James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 27-29. Rachels is not here arguing against pluralism, but against cultural relativism. His examples demonstrate a significant overlap of values between cultures despite what looks initially to be evidence that even judgments regarding such serious matters as taking another's life are relative to culture. The pluralists can take from Rachels' discussion the lesson that there are enough shared values to provide common ground by which to criticize other views.

severely limiting Rachels' approach which points out that some apparent moral disagreement disappear as we note situational differences or differences in nonmoral belief. In the case involving Roman and Christian virtues—one emphasizing courage and justice and the other compassion and mercy—we find not only inconsistent sets, but alternative rankings of virtues. This differs from Rachels' examples where moral disagreement disappears once the relevant situations are better described.

The differences between Roman and Christian virtues might, though, be traceable to different religious or metaphysical views. But locating the source of a moral disagreement in religious or metaphysical beliefs does not eliminate the moral disagreement. We are still faced with a moral conflict: we must still decide what we ought to do or what kind of people we wish to be. It is not that these different groups of people share moral views but differ simply with respect to religious and metaphysical views, but that these nonmoral beliefs directly impact, or are intertwined with, the moral views. For instance, belief in a particular image of, and the human relationship with God leads to valuing mercy rather than military courage. So, while it might be true that *if* Berlin's Romans and Christians had shared religious and metaphysical beliefs they would have shared moral views, it is also true that these religious and metaphysical differences made it such that they did not in fact share moral views. Furthermore, unlike the case of most factual disagreements, because there is often no non-question begging way of determining the truth of the competing religious and metaphysical views, the related moral views remain entrenched. It is also worth noting that although a political solution or a compromise can often be found, in many cases of moral disagreement these possibilities do not by themselves resolve the moral questions.

Lastly, a very different concern (though one at the heart of monistic thinking) is whether explicitly seeking to accommodate difference would lead to an unwanted relativism. After all, what kind of standard by which to evaluate moral claims could possibly exist in light of the diversity of beliefs and values? If we pick some values over others, it seems that we are simply favoring one group's views over another's. Berlin's answer is that while there is significant difference of belief and values, this difference has limitations due to the embeddedness of beliefs and values in specific human societies: "There are, if not universal values, at any rate a minimum without which societies could scarcely survive;" most generally, we must "avoid extremes of suffering."[29] James Rachels argues similarly, saying that every culture must care for its young, discourage lying, and limit homicide: "Not every rule can vary from society to society."[30] Common standards by which we can make moral evaluations across cultures exist, however loosely, even amid difference. The worry that pluralism leads to an unwanted relativism may always remain in the background. Berlin's and Rachel's comments do, however, go a long way to minimizing these concerns. The work here in the second and third chapters goes further by demonstrating how at least some limits can be set to the range of legitimate moral claims.

Pluralism, then, is an attempt to respond to the fact of rationally irresolvable differences of beliefs and values, and the desire both for tolerance and the ability to rationally evaluate competing claims. This rationally irresolvable difference can occur both within and between persons and is the result of either (or both) epistemological and

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[29]Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 14-15.

[30]Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 29-30.

ontological causes. The differences in question can be located at different levels of moral thinking—theory, worldviews, etc.—though to be moral pluralism there must result differences in evaluations of particular cases. Furthermore, pluralism does not depend upon the existence of moral dilemmas where this means that one does wrong regardless of which of two (or more) conflicting or mutually exclusive duties one completes. Nor, does it reduce to relativism despite taking difference seriously. Finally, it does not become monistic or absolutist when some moral disagreements are traceable to religious or metaphysical differences.

Individualism and Holism

If, as many environmentalists hope, things such as ecosystems and species turn out to be morally considerable, a pluralistic account might prove useful as a way of avoiding Sagoff's dilemma that either wholes *or* individuals get to count morally.[31] Lest this seem like merely an intellectualist dispute between individualists and holists, consider the decades old, and still unresolved case of mountain goats in the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state. Two to three hundred non-indigenous mountain goats have been living in the relatively isolated Olympic mountains since being introduced in the 1920's, threatening native plant species—some of which live only there—and causing

[31]Moral pluralism as described in the previous section might be the correct way of thinking about ethics in general even if the conflicting sources of value behind individualism and holism do not both turn out to be legitimate. The individualism–holism conflict is just one potential source of unresolvable moral difference. Or to put it another way, if pluralism is the right way to think about ethics in general, perhaps it would direct us to a new and useful way of thinking about the individualism–holism problem.

serious soil erosion.[32] Ideally, the goats could be caught alive and relocated to their native habitat of the nearby Cascade Range or Rockies or sterilized so the problem would gradually run itself out. However, because of the extreme terrain of the Olympic Mountains and the lack of a sterilization program which would remove enough of the animals, the only viable way of protecting the environment is to remove the goats by killing them. Despite the harshness of this solution, many environmentalists prefer it to leaving the goats alone, especially since there are many mountain goats in other areas of the West. Predictably, animal welfarists object to anything that would significantly harm the goats.[33]

Perhaps a resolution could be found without invoking pluralism. After all, not all individualistic perspectives would argue for leaving the goats alone. Gary Varner has argued that hunting is acceptable on an animal welfarist approach when not hunting would lead to worse suffering for the animals involved.[34] Because natural predators have been extirpated from much of the contiguous United States, deer hunting, for example,

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[32]There appears to be some uncertainty as to the extent of damage to the plants and whether the goats are the primary culprits. The specifics of the case matter less, however, than does the possibility that the case suggests: there will be times when individualistic and holistic concerns collide. With this in mind, I will proceed with the assumption that the goats are the primary cause of the environmental damage and that the plants in question are in fact endangered by the goats.

[33]See for example: "Goats Not Native to Park," *Vancouver (WA) The Columbian*, 23 July 2000, available from *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*, online data-base, Internet; Mike Black Bothell, "Olympic National Park Animals—Special-Permit Hunt of Mountain Goats Would Benefit Many Interests," *The Seattle Times*, 1 February 1997, Letters to the Editor, available from *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*, online data-base, Internet; "Opposition Mounts to Killing Goats," *Vancouver (WA) The Columbian*, 24 July 1995, available from *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*, online data-base, Internet; "Mountain Goat Foes, Friends Lock Horns in Hearing," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 4 May 1995, available from *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*, online data-base, Internet.

[34]Gary E. Varner, "Can Animal Rights Activists Be Environmentalists?" *People, Penguins, and Plastic Trees: Basic Issues in Environmental Ethics* 2nd ed., ed. Christine Pierce and Donald VanDeVeer (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995) 254-73.

prevents that population from reaching unsustainable levels leading to slow and painful starvation for tens of thousands of the animals each year. Hunting in this case is less harmful than is not hunting in terms of the welfare of individual animals. Those who die generally do so much more quickly and with much less pain, and those who live do so with much less hunger. Varner points out that this would be good from an environmentalist perspective also since the controlled deer population would be less destructive to the plants and trees upon which they feed. The individualistic and holistic perspectives converge, then, on Varner's view. But even if he is right with respect to deer herds, he would likely admit that such convergence is unlikely in the mountain goat case: doing nothing seems clearly best for the goats but clearly not so for the plants (especially since, mountain goats do not reach their ecosystem's carrying capacity as quickly as do deer).

An individualistic approach that pits individual plants, rather than endangered *species* of plants, against individual goats would also push in the direction of protecting the animals. Individualistic approaches rely on certain characteristics only individuals possess, such as having interests and preferences, to explain why it is that these things are morally considerable. Animals such as goats have such characteristics; plants do not. A "life-ethic," which considers all individual living entities as morally considerable due simply to their being alive would also have difficulty favoring the plants over the goats. To be coherent, life accounts must make room for the acceptability of plant eaters eating plants (and, for that matter, meat eaters eating meat), and as herbivores the goats are doing nothing contrary to a life-ethic which would justify their removal (by killing) from that ecosystem.

Furthermore, traditional individualistic and anthropocentric arguments, such as those emphasizing the aesthetic or scientific usefulness of the threatened plants, are seen by many environmental philosophers as too fragile a ground for something so important as protecting nature. In such arguments it is human interests that get to count as the relevant reasons for or against a particular action, and too often short term financial interests win the day to the detriment of the environment. Often this is due to the difficulty of comparing the quantifiable (in dollars) business interests with the not so easily quantifiable aesthetic or scientific concerns. Many environmentalists are driven in addition by the conviction that even if anthropocentric arguments justify significant protection of nature, it is because nature has value in and of itself that it should be protected. Because the individualist arguments fail to account for such intuitions, and in this case fail to justify the removal of the goats, environmentalists often appeal to the value of the endangered plant species or damaged ecosystems to make their case. It is worth noting that in addition to the theoretical impasse, the entrenchment of individualists and holists sometimes prevents them from reaching a mutually acceptable practical resolution in cases of conflict. In the mountain goat example, neither side feels it can back down because each sees the other view as seriously wrong, leaving little room for compromise.

If pluralism is the right way to think about ethics, and the individualism–holism problem in particular, our approach as theorists and people concerned about real-world problems is likely to differ from that of traditional ethicists seeking absolutist monistic theories. Bryan Norton, arguing against monism in environmental ethics, distinguishes between an applied and a practical approach to doing ethics. The former favors

developing a theory first and then bringing it to bear upon practical moral questions. In contrast to this top-down way of doing ethics, the practical approach focuses on real world problems using theory only as a tool to sort out relevant issues. Theory and principles are generated from particular evaluations, not prior to them. Moral monism and the applied approach are typically found together—theorists look for the one correct moral theory with the expectation that it will provide unambiguous answers to particular cases. But monists are wrong, Norton says, to think that a single theory can generate all of our human obligations to each other and to the rest of nature. We need a pluralism at least at the level of principles, drawing from careful work with cases, not derived a priori and then simply applied.[35]

Monists, of course, need not be as oriented towards the top-down approach as Norton supposes. They could embrace some sort of reflective equilibrium, moving between evaluations of particular cases, principles, and theory in order to get theory and principles that most accurately cohere with our (similarly considered) commonsense moral intuitions. In fact, the monist's claim that apparent moral dilemmas point to needed changes in our theories is an example of their thinking "upward" from cases to theory. There is, however, some truth to Norton's description: seekers of singly correct, unifying theories do tend in the direction of applying theory in a top-down fashion. Reflective equilibrium might be how we arrive at the correct moral theory, but once we have it, it could presumably generate correct answers to each moral quandary.

Pluralism pushes us more firmly towards a model of reflective equilibrium in

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[35]Bryan G. Norton, "Integration or Reduction: Two Approaches to Environmental Values," *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London: Routledge, 1996) 107-108.

which the goal is not to eventually find the single right moral theory which we could then apply. Rather, pluralism becomes, as Martin Benjamin has suggested, one of the elements which "must be included among our background beliefs and theories in wide reflective equilibrium"—as Rawls had said, reasonable pluralism is a permanent feature of free societies.[36] It is also a feature within individual minds. So unlike the monists' use of reflective equilibrium, an appreciation of rationally irreducible difference is, for pluralists, an assumption one brings to the process.

In practice, this means a vastly more complex job for ethicists. We must continue to look for consistency without too quickly assuming that inconsistency implies problems with our principles or theories, especially where the conflicting intuitions, beliefs, and values run deep. In the mountain goat case, we should not expect to be able to simply apply one or the other approach—individualistic or holistic—in order to arrive at the one correct answer. If the environmentalists' position is one of seeing ecosystems and species as morally considerable while not giving up on the same attribution for individual people and nonhuman animals, perhaps they should resist a single-minded holism (and vice versa for individualists). Furthermore, pluralism suggests a strategy of compromise when faced with moral disagreement. This does not mean that one must sacrifice one's integrity, but it does mean that one should make an effort to see both sides of a dispute as potentially legitimate—putting oneself, as much as is possible, in the other's shoes—thereby making compromise morally, not just pragmatically, acceptable.[37]

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[36]Martin Benjamin, "Between Subway and Spaceship: Practical Ethics at the Outset of the Twenty-first Century," *Hastings Center Report* (July-August 2001) 27.

[37]See: Martin Benjamin, *Splitting the Difference: Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics* (Lawrence, KS: U P of Kansas, 1990).

Cases like that of the mountain goats pose a serious challenge to anyone wishing to bridge the gap between the two general approaches of individualistic (though not necessarily atomistic) and holistic ethics in a way that takes each seriously. (Though this is not to insist at this stage that each perspective is correct—perhaps an individualistic account alone, for example, could be shown to sufficiently account for environmentalists' intuitions.) The problem as stated is that individualist approaches rely on criteria for moral considerability that the sorts of things environmentalists want to protect—species and ecosystems—do not possess; but, many of us are committed to moral standing for both individual people and animals *and* ecosystems.

Pluralism suggests a cautious tolerance rather than blind acceptance; it does not contend that any view is just as good as any other. At this point, I have shown that pluralism is a plausible way to think about ethics and have responded to several broad arguments against it. What is needed now to pursue a pluralistic ethic to address the individualism–holism problem is a more developed theory, set of principles, or framework by which to organize our thinking regarding what sorts of things can count as reasons for and against moral claims. What is it about being human, for example, that requires us to respond to each other in certain ways, allowing for a variety of possible actions but nevertheless setting limits as Berlin had suggested? What is it about being a nonhuman animal or an ecosystem that is relevant to how we can interact with them? For such an account to be acceptable, it must cohere with our common sense ethical views, be as internally consistency as possible (while not insisting upon absolute consistency), and conform with our general world-view (it should allow that normal adult humans have free will and its claims should fit with those of evolutionary theory, for example). Answers to

some of these issues push us from having made pluralism theoretically plausible towards creating a useful and substantive pluralistic environmental ethic. This is the aim of the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2

INDIVIDUAL ENTITIES AND MORAL CONSIDERABILITY

Introduction

If a pluralistic theory is to lead to a better understanding of the individualism–holism problem, it must be able to narrow the range of possible beliefs and values to avoid an unwanted relativism. It cannot simply assert that all individual organisms and ecosystems have moral standing. Knowing why things have standing will likely impact the range and significance of various obligations we moral agents have towards them. This chapter seeks to narrow the field of candidates for properties conferring moral status to individuals. Contemporary work in philosophy regarding the moral status of nonhuman animals provides many insights related to this project.

Prior to the publication of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* in 1975, few people questioned the moral acceptability of using nonhuman animals[1] for food, research, clothing, or entertainment. There had always been some prohibition against cruelty to animals, but this was accompanied by little discussion as to why this was so. Aquinas and Kant had each argued that what made cruelty to animals wrong was not that it violated the integrity, rights, or interests of animals, but that it might make the person involved more likely to harm other people. Even when the welfare of animals themselves was considered, the use of animals for our benefit was easily justified by appealing to our

[1]For simplicity I will often use the word "animal" to refer to *non-human* animals, though this is not meant to prejudice the case in favor of a morally significant distinction between humans and other animals.

human interests and superior moral worth.[2] Since Singer's influential book, traditional views regarding our relationship with animals have faced serious questioning. Nearly everyone now agrees that causing unnecessary suffering to animals is a wrong against the animals themselves, though this often amounts simply to a commonsense belief that animals can suffer[3] and that there is a *prima facie* moral prohibition against causing suffering.[4]

Even research psychologists, long cited by animal-welfare activists as among the most egregious abusers of animals, have come to recognize the moral prohibition against causing unnecessary pain to their animals subjects. The American Psychological Association's (APA) guidelines for animal research, for example, state that only those research procedures which "minimize discomfort to the animal should be used," that "the scientific purpose of the research should be of sufficient potential to justify the use of animals," and that non-animal alternatives should be used whenever possible. Clearly the

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[2]It is noteworthy that the traditionally favored term "cruelty" is more of a description of the actor's motivation or state of mind than it is of the particular harm caused (people can act cruelly with unintended good results, for example), indicating an overwhelming preoccupation with the human side of the human–animal relationship.

[3]The commonsense belief that animals can feel pain comes, no doubt, from living with animals and seeing that they react in ways similar to us to stimuli which cause us pain—they cry out, engage in avoidance behavior, and the like. Sharing similar neurological hardware and a common evolutionary heritage are further reasons to believe that they, unlike perhaps computers programed to respond to certain stimuli, share some important experiences with us: they live subjective lives in which pain is possible. In fact, it is the belief that some animals are quite like us that drives not only arguments against but *for* things like animal research: it is only because some animals are very much like us that we can extrapolate what we learn about them to ourselves, including what is gained in pain (both physical and emotional) studies by psychologists. For an argument dismissing animal pain, see Peter Harrison "Do Animals Feel Pain?" *Philosophy* 66 (1991).

[4]Although positive states such as enjoyment and contentment are importantly related to the negative states of pain and suffering and are thus relevant moral considerations, suffering seems to be the most immediately relevant: although a life high in things such as pleasure is likely to be one low in suffering, a moral *pro*scription against causing harm seems *prima facie* weightier than a moral *pre*scription to assist in the finding of pleasure. It is for this reason that I will usually talk here of suffering and harming rather than of pleasure and aiding.

APA, which generally supports animal experimentation, does not think the justification for animal research lies in the fact that animals do not suffer; in fact, they declare that "psychologists should act on the assumption that procedures that would produce pain in humans would also do so in other animals."[5]

The dispute between researchers and abolitionists is not, then, about whether or not animals can feel pain, nor whether or when it is morally acceptable to cause pain. Rather, the debate typically revolves around the relative value of humans and animals and the importance of particular human and animal interests, organized on some scale of trivial to vital. The first of these issues can be described in terms of moral considerability or intrinsic value.[6] Are there reasons for thinking, for example, that humans "count" more than do animals in moral deliberation? The second issue involves the weighing of competing particular interests, such as the need for food and shelter. These two concerns are intimately connected. If, for example, humans are more morally considerable than are animals, when it comes to weighing competing interests humans would enjoy an advantage at the outset such that less vital human needs could outweigh more vital animal needs.

In this chapter, I will argue that of the plausible candidates for properties conferring moral considerability to individual entities—consciousness, self-consciousness

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[5]American Psychological Association, "Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Animals," http://www.apa.org/science/anguide.html

[6]By "moral considerability" I mean the extent to which one "counts" in and of oneself, independent of one's usefulness to others, in moral deliberation. This is often tightly tied to the notion of intrinsic value, which can either be defined similarly or taken to be that which makes someone or something morally considerable. Because the notion of intrinsic value is in need of justification, in either usage, to the same extent that is moral considerability—an unexplained notion of intrinsic value is not particularly useful as an explanation or justification for moral considerability—I will use them interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

or self-awareness, rationality, the ability to use language, autonomy, moral agency, the ability to feel pain, and the having of interests or preferences—having experiential interests including the ability to feel pain is the most important. (The question of the moral considerability of wholes will be discussed in later chapters.) To get clear on this claim I will begin by contrasting Singer's utilitarian and Tom Regan's rights-based approaches to animal welfare. Their theories overlap in a way I find particularly useful. Next, I will discuss the claim that being alive confers value or moral considerability. Although I am sympathetic to this view, the difficulties with it are serious enough that it should play a minimal role, if any, in moral reasoning, perhaps only when considering the differences between non-experiential living entities and inanimate objects. Lastly, I will argue that although things such as autonomy and seeing oneself as a self are relevant to judgments regarding moral considerability and the vitalness of interests, they do not directly confer moral considerability to their bearers. Instead, they indicate the possession of greater awareness, sensitivity, and the like, which give the entity to which they belong more interests, or interests that can be thwarted or furthered to a greater extent, than those without these characteristics.

In terms of the larger project of developing a Humean pluralistic environmental ethic, the claims developed in this chapter suggest certain limits to the range of acceptable alternative moral positions with respect to individual entities. This is important because any acceptable pluralism must not entail the possibilities that any and every moral belief or value is equally legitimate.

Singer, Regan, and Interests

Some notion of interests, understood in terms of a "trivial-to-vital" continuum, often plays a central role in our thinking about human-human conflicts. For example, a sick or injured person generally has a greater right to a doctor's time than does a healthy person seeking a general exam.[7] The same is true when it comes to our interactions with animals. The APA would have scientists engaged in animal research weigh the costs to the animals against the benefits to us. It would be good, then, to have some way of marking off vital from trivial interests.[8] To a large extent, this would involve empirically finding out what interests various beings have and how central they are to their lives and well-being. This would likely change with the situation. Factory farming, which seems to clearly violate the vital needs of animals, would not be, all else being equal, justified in terms of satisfying Americans' interest in eating meat. Less intensive farming goes further towards an acceptable balance, while sustainable hunting of non-domesticated animals by Eskimos might fair even better if the animals are killed quickly. In any case, it is difficult to know with any precision what would count as vital or trivial for all the various animals. Proceeding by developing a list of human and animal interests sorted according to rough calculations of vitalness would be, to say the least, an immense undertaking. Fortunately, the notion of trivial-to-vital interests can work at a fairly

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[7]This is not to say that ethics is only about resolving conflicts. But considerations of interests are on the table even when wondering specifically about duties or virtues. For example, a duty to keep one's promises can only make sense if doing so generally furthers people's interests.

[8]There are, of course, lots of other concerns. We have obligations due specifically to our actions, such as in promise making; obligations due to familial relationships; and obligations to society in general. Further, speaking of interests does not commit us to thinking along utilitarian lines. It is hard to imagine what a duty to keep a promise—a typical deontology example—would mean if no one had an interest in promises being kept. A principlist approach such as W. D. Ross's also presumably involves some weighing of concerns, desires, wants and needs (all of which I have been calling "interests").

commonsensical level, enabling us to set this issue aside and examine that of moral considerability. There are, after all, plenty of cases in which what is trivial and vital are clear.[9] As scientists learn more about the types of animals and the conditions for their welfare, these insights can be brought to bear on our moral reasoning.

To make the best moral judgments possible, it would be useful to know which entities have moral standing in the sense that moral agents must take their well-being into account, and how much so. By itself, the trivial-to-vital continuum is not terribly useful in making practical decisions. As mentioned, this distinction means something wholly different in practice if there were a hierarchy of morally considerable beings as opposed to parity of moral worth between, say, humans and the farm and research animals we are most often concerned with. Depending upon what gives a being moral standing, a hierarchy of moral considerability might cut across species lines. It might turn out, for example, that human infants do not enjoy the same level of moral considerability as their adult counterparts. This could impact how we rank the importance of various sorts of medical research in which animals are used: work benefiting infants may have difficulty overcoming the moral prohibition against causing nonhuman research subjects harm.

What about a being makes it such that we moral agents must provide sufficient reasons in order to justly treat it as a means to our own ends? As mentioned, there are a variety of plausible candidates: consciousness, self-consciousness or self-awareness, rationality, the ability to use language, autonomy, moral agency, the ability to feel pain, and the having of interests or preferences. Perhaps there are others, but these come to

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[9]Martin Benjamin makes this point in "Ethics and Animal Consciousness," *Social Ethics* 2nd ed. ed. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembat (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 498.

mind as the most obviously relevant given both traditional ethical theory and commonsense moral beliefs. We should be cautious not to be too quick in picking out pain and the ability to feel it as the only relevant considerations on the assumption that pain is always a harm to be avoided or that all harm is somehow reducible to pain. There are likely different ways in which one can be harmed, not all of which involve pain, cases of pain which are not harm,[10] and complex interactions between feeling pain and other mental properties or characteristics such as self-awareness and rationality.[11] Second, we might wonder which of the proposed morally relevant characteristics best justify commonsense intuitions such as that all entities are not equally morally considerable. Any view which made mosquitos, or even frogs, equally morally considerable with cats or dogs would be immediately suspect.

Peter Singer is among those who emphasize suffering (and its corresponding opposites of happiness, pleasure, and well-being) as the most central aspect of morality. As a utilitarian, he thinks that actions should be evaluated according to their consequences, or more specifically, according to the extent to which they cause suffering or well-being. Sentience is the mark of a morally considerable being. What sets Singer's work apart from many traditional utilitarians is the effort he has made to argue that

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[10]Pain which helps its bearer to avoid bodily damage or leads to mental or emotional maturity (as with disciplinary action) is not generally a harm.

[11]As we think about these issues, it is important to keep in mind that our understanding of how, and to what extent, these suggested characteristics play a role in nonhuman life is limited by what we can experience as humans. Although introspection reveals a connection between pain and consciousness in our own lives, it has limited utility with respect to others, especially when it comes to animals we think are not conscious. Drawing conclusions about other humans is one thing, but we find ourselves on increasingly shaky ground as we move to those not significantly structurally or behaviorally like us. It is understandably, then, that much of what we think about various characteristics beings might possess and their connection to moral considerability comes from thinking about our own situation.

because some animals are sentient, they should be included in our moral community. Ignoring this conclusion amounts to "speciesism," which, like sexism or racism, refers to arbitrarily preferring members of one's own group over those of others in moral deliberation. There are many differences between animals and humans which might set them apart, including levels of intelligence, kinds of social unions formed, and degrees of autonomy. But none of these mark off humans as special, as all cut across species lines. And in any case, while these characteristics might be important in thinking about how a being might be helped or hindered by an action, sentience is that which makes it possible for one to be helped or hindered. It alone establishes, for Singer, a sort of base line above which all have equal moral standing.[12]

Being morally considerable means, for Singer, getting to count in a sort of cost-benefit analysis aimed at maximizing the good in the world, where the good is happiness, pleasure, or well-being.[13] But, as Tom Regan points out, this cannot mean that all who share the morally relevant characteristic of sentience should be, *in the end*, treated the same, or even the same with respect to their differing needs and desires. Utilitarianism cannot guarantee equal treatment in this sense because cases could arise where equal treatment does not maximize utility, the ultimate moral principle for utilitarianism. So, equal "treatment" must, for Singer, refer rather to each sentient being counting equally at the outset, or at the beginning of the utilitarian calculus, and not with respect to the

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[12]See: Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation," *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds., Michael E. Zimmerman, et al (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 22-32; Singer, *Animal Liberation* 2nd ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1990).

[13]Singer is aware of the problems of too simplistically focusing on happiness or pleasure and argues that for normal adult humans, at least, preference satisfaction is the better way to calculate utility.

outcome. How each individual gets treated in the end is determined by which action would maximize overall happiness, pleasure, or something similar.[14]

Utilitarianism does seem to capture some of our commonsense ethical beliefs. It rightly points to happiness, preference satisfaction, or the like, as morally significant and recognizes that consequences matter. And at times we do think that the correct decision is the one that brings about the most happiness for the greatest number, especially when we are making policy decisions in which we do not feel obligations to particular individuals who might be affected. But by itself, utilitarianism falls quite short of capturing all of our commonsense ethical beliefs, and in fact, can sometimes run directly against these convictions. The standard criticism is that cases can easily be imagined where utilitarianism would not only allow, but mandate an unacceptable harm to some individual in its requirement to maximize happiness for the greatest number. Although Singer sometimes talks about equal treatment, as we just saw, this must refer to equality of consideration prior to the utility calculation. Whether utilitarianism can be reformulated (perhaps as rule-utilitarianism) to avoid this traditional objection is, it seems to me, still open for discussion.[15] But even if it could be recast such that individuals would be protected from, for example, being killed or tortured, the justification would

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[14]Tom Regan, "Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9.4 (1980): 305-24.

[15]There could be a rule, for example, that stipulated that no one can be punished for a crime he or she did not commit even if in some cases false accusations and convictions would maximize utility. The common objection to this move, however, is to ask why, even if the rule would generally maximize utility, utilitarianism would not demand that when breaking the rule would maximize utility the rule should be broken. Rule utilitarianism would be reduced back to act utilitarianism with all its problems. Exceptions could be added to the rules to cover such cases, but if exceptions are developed for every special case, we again end up with something more like act utilitarianism. For an interesting discussion see: J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1973).

still be that this would in fact bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number. This, however, betrays our commonsense belief that maximum utility is not the reason why individuals should be protected from harm; rather, it is because individuals matter in and of themselves.

These doubts concerning a full-fledged commitment to utilitarianism are important because they give us pause from simply following Singer to the conclusion that it is all and only sentient beings which are to enjoy equal moral considerability. As a utilitarian, Singer is committed to at least two things: to the principle of utility which says that pleasure (or happiness, preference satisfaction, etc.) is the ultimate good to be maximized and to the belief that all those who can experience pain and happiness (i.e., all sentient beings) must be equally taken into consideration in a calculation of utility. Once this is established, Singer could simply look about to see which beings possess the capacity to suffer in order to determine which are to enjoy equal moral consideration. Utilitarianism and sentience go very much hand in hand in this way. But if we have reasons to doubt that utilitarianism captures all of ethics we have reason to wonder if sentience is the only morally relevant characteristic.

Nonetheless, the ability to suffer does seem to be one important aspect of what it means to be morally considerable. In fact, central to both commonsense moral thinking and philosophical moral theorizing is the prohibition against causing suffering. Sentient beings, it might be said, have a *prima facie* interest in not being made to suffer. Evaluations of our use of nonhuman animals must, as the APA guidelines cited above reflect, take this into account. If this is right, then Singer seems correct to question the traditional view that moral considerability cuts neatly along species lines. Not only can

many nonhuman animals suffer, but it seems that some can suffer to a greater extent than can some humans (e.g., infants and the severely mentally enfeebled). The question might be rephrased, then, to ask whether there are other characteristics in addition to sentience that are morally significant, and to what extent these other characteristics follow species lines.

Tom Regan is one who thinks utilitarianism emphasizes the wrong thing. Utilitarianism allows for the treatment of individuals that runs counter to our commonsense moral beliefs because it treats individuals as "mere receptacles" for value, rather than as things of value in and of themselves.[16] As mentioned, even if utilitarianism could be recast to avoid serious untoward actions against innocent individuals (for example, by shifting to rule utilitarianism), the reason would remain that of maximizing utility, contrary to our commonsense belief that this alone is not why individuals should not be made to suffer. Rather, it is because, according to Regan, some individuals possess intrinsic value. As such, they must not be treated merely as a means to our ends, including the end of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The consequentialism of Singer might well treat all morally considerable beings equal at the outset of a utilitarian calculation, but Regan thinks a focus on intrinsic value necessitates equal treatment *in the end.* This is translated into practice for humans through the carving out of certain core rights which can only be overcome by consequentialist arguments of an extremely weighty sort. Where there is no relevant property difference (for Regan, no

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[16]Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights," *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven C. Cahn and Peter Markie (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 826.

difference in intrinsic value), there should be no difference with respect to rights. Respect for intrinsic value trumps consequences; rights trump utilitarian calculations.

Regan is developing a Kantian line of thought here, though he does not suppose that it is autonomy or moral agency that distinguish beings with intrinsic value from those without. Instead, Regan agrees with Singer that what matters ethically is the ability to suffer. Regan might deny this, saying that Singer emphasizes pleasure and pain while he himself focuses on an entity's experiencing itself as a "subject of a life that is better or worse for [itself]."[17] But, while the differences between their views are vast due to their allegiances to competing ethical theories, their views concerning what makes a being morally considerable are more alike than either would probably care to admit. What matters for both is *experience connected to the satisfaction or frustration of interests*. For Regan, being an experiencing subject of a life means that one has interests that can be thwarted or furthered, which makes a being intrinsically valuable and hence protected from being treated merely as a means. For Singer, a sentient being is one who has interests that can be thwarted or furthered, which makes a being a receptacle for pain, pleasure, happiness, etc., all of which are morally relevant. Even the deontological charge to treat morally considerable beings as ends in themselves reflects the possession of interests—after all, one cannot be disrespected if one does not, or cannot, care. So, although the standard view is to see Singer and Regan as representing wholly opposing camps, they are in loose agreement that experiencers, and only experiencers, have interests the frustration or satisfaction of which is what ethics is all about. The empirical

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[17]Tom Regan, "Animal Rights, Human Wrongs," *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 44.

question then becomes who exactly is an experiencer, while a remaining theoretical question is which moral theory (say, utilitarianism or deontology) is correct.[18]

There are two main parts to Regan's argument: the claim that what makes a being morally considerable is the possession of intrinsic value, and the negative argument that if human intrinsic value buys rights which trump consequences, then the same must be the case for nonhumans with intrinsic value. Reliance on the notion of intrinsic value, however, faces the problem of explaining what this value amounts to. Such value is not, after all, something empirical research can measure. It might be that to say of something that it possesses intrinsic value is just to say that we do not think its interests can be thwarted simply to further another's (trivial) interests. But, if we ask why we think these interests should not be treated so lightly, we cannot then simply repeat that the entity in question possesses intrinsic value. We need some account for either the claim that something has intrinsic value or that it should not be treated merely as a means. Regan seems to appeal to commonsense moral thinking about human life: it is clear that most of us think that humans cannot be treated merely as a means (consequences are not the only thing that matters ethically) and the reason seems to have something to do with each of us being centers of subjective experience with desires, goals, hopes, preferences, and the like, which confers value upon an individual. If we accept this without further argument, we ought to accept it with respect to those animals who also are experiencing subjects of a life. Perhaps we cannot get much beyond these commonsense moral convictions.

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[18]I do not want to push this too far. Sentience is a trait which is no doubt attributable to a much larger class of entities than is being an experiencing subject of a life since Regan means to include in this latter notion a sense of self, projects, and other things dependent on a fairly developed cognitive capacity. I also certainly do not mean to suggest that Singer and Regan go about making moral evaluations in the same way—after all, one is very much a utilitarian and the other a rights theorist.

Utilitarians have a similar problem (and perhaps a similar response) of explaining why pleasure, happiness, or preference satisfaction is the ultimate good. In any case, by intrinsic value Regan does not mean something mystical which must be "intuited" by us. Rather, it is supposed to capture the widely held commonsense moral conviction that it is interest-holding beings themselves which count, not some overall abstract happiness. As Christopher Stone puts it, "A right is not . . . some strange substance that one either has or does not have," but to override them one "must go through certain procedures to do so [which] are a measure of what we value as a society."[19]

It might be objected that even if talk of intrinsic value is simply shorthand (whether or not Regan thinks of it this way) for saying that beings with interests are not to be treated as mere means (i.e., that they are morally considerable), this does not mean that such beings have rights. First, there are general worries that properly speaking, there are no such things as rights: rights are simply rhetorically useful ways of saying that in some cases individuals (or groups) matter more than do consequences. Regan's answer is that absent rights, *per se*, we would still object to actions which cause non-trivial harm if the justification is simply that it brings about maximal utility. So, if there are no "rights," properly speaking, we would still need an explanation for why we would object to violations of individual integrity.[20]

Regan seems right to say that we do not need to decide whether rights language is the most appropriate in order to agree that in some cases consequentialist reasons are not

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[19]Christopher Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing?: Toward Legal Rights For Natural Objects," *Should Trees Have Standing? And Other Essays on Law, Morals and the Environment* 2nd ed. (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana, 1996), 27.

[20]Regan, "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism," 162.

sufficient to justify using morally considerable beings as mere means. I agree that if there are rights, beings with intrinsic (as opposed to merely instrumental) value are the types of thing that have rights, and that any acknowledgment that rights talk is simply politically useful short hand for something else does little to harm Regan's central claims.

An objection which cuts more deeply rests on the assertion that duties to other humans arise because of the special relationships we have with them: people can fight for, negotiate, or otherwise ask for things from us. Nonhumans cannot. So, although humans have rights, nonhumans do not; or to put it another way, although we owe duties to other humans, we do not owe them to nonhumans.

It is unlikely, however, that we would be willing to say that we do not have duties toward humans unable to make claims on us, such as infants or the severely mentally disabled. Perhaps instead, the reason we have duties only to other humans is, more precisely, that we are in reciprocal relationships with them: people have rights (or whatever they stand for) to which we have corresponding duties only when we have rights to which they have corresponding duties. And because animals are not moral agents, they can have duties to no one. But this too seems not to fit with our commonsense moral beliefs, even with respect to human-human relationships. We think we do have duties to infants and the mentally disabled even though they may not be moral agents. Of course, our commonsense moral beliefs might be wrong on this count. Perhaps the duties we owe these individuals are due to the fact that they are potential moral agents or that we value familial relations to such an extent that we are unwilling to treat infants as mere means. If we go the potential-persons route, we need an account of moral considerability which, unlike Singer's and Regan's, sees properties of being a

person, such as moral agency or autonomy, as the morally relevant characteristic. I have doubts about these properties themselves conferring value or moral considerability, as will be discussed later. If we go the second route (through the valuing of familial relationships), we may have to acknowledge that infants or the mentally disabled without family members or other loved ones may, unless we can think of other consequentialist reasons against it, be used as mere means when it suits us. This, it seems, would be a hard pill to swallow.

So at this point, we have two competing moral theories with different, though not terribly different, criteria for moral considerability. The criteria themselves seem to fit with our commonsense moral views in that they refer to experiential qualities of the sort we generally take to be important, and emphasize the commonsense moral prohibition against causing harm. In addition, we have reasons against thinking only in terms of consequences, as Singer's thorough-going utilitarianism would push us to do. Regan's counterbalance seems welcome, though it comes with the need for an account of intrinsic value and perhaps need not be couched in terms of rights. The real problem, if we like some of what we see in both approaches, would be to work out some schema that makes room for both consequentialist and deontological reasoning, perhaps in some sort of pluralistic moral theory. After considering some alternatives, I will return to Singer's and Regan's belief that what makes something morally considerable is having experiential interests which can be thwarted or furthered.

The Life-ethic Account

One reason to try to move beyond the focus on interests of the experiential sort is that some think that there are other individual entities which are morally considerable but which do not meet Singer's or Regan's criteria. Many think, for example, that plants such as California's ancient redwoods are intrinsically valuable and deserve protection independent of our interests. If they are right, then Singer and Regan must be wrong in thinking that only sentient creatures or experiencing subjects of life get to count morally. Perhaps we should draw the net of moral considerability more widely.

Singer had argued for an expanding ethical circle, pointing to the gradual inclusion of women and non-whites into the circle of equally valuable beings to suggest that sentient animals would be next.[21] Christopher Stone pushes this notion further to include all living things, even the nonsentient. He is primarily concerned with the granting of legal rights, but his argument for the expansion of the circle is cast largely in ethical terms, as can be seen in his focus on interests. Stone argues that natural objects such as plants can clearly communicate their needs to us: "[My] lawn tells me that it wants water by a certain dryness of the blades and soil—immediately obvious to the touch—the appearance of bald spots, yellowing, and a lack of springiness after being walked on."[22] In a later essay he seems to have backed off talking about the "wants" or "interests" of non-experiential beings, admitting that "preference-enlisting works only in

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[21]Darwin and Aldo Leopold offer two interesting earlier descriptions and uses of the expanding ethical circle concept. See for example: Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford U P, 1949).

[22]Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing?: Toward Legal Rights For Natural Objects," 18.

regard to nonpersons at the higher end of the intelligence scale."[23] He argues that "disinterested things" be nonetheless protected independent of our interests and urges us to use commonsense intuition backed up by ordinary language and scientific understanding of the "essence of things" to make judgments regarding our interactions with them. Thinking about such objects as we do future persons and the comatose, neither of which enjoy full personhood, should guide us in protecting, for example, a river's "riverhood."[24] Presumably, we should think of what their interests would be *had they interests*. If healthy grass is green and lush, it can be said to have (pseudo) interests in nutrient-rich soil, water, and sunlight. For Stone, then, the circle of ethical concern ought to expand in terms of interests (in this way he is similar to Singer and Regan), and where we encounter disinterested objects we should proceed as if they have needs analogous to those of interested beings.

It is not clear, however, how far we can push analogies between rivers, future persons and the comatose, and full persons. In the future-persons and comatose cases we are dealing with beings who would otherwise be fairly similar to us in preferences—at least as similar as we would expect anyone to be as a fellow human. In the river case, we are dealing with something we are not sure what since it is not clear what counts as a river: just the water, the banks, algae, fish, birds, animals who drink out of it, the entire watershed? And, although we know what we, and perhaps even presumably interested fish or otters, want the river to be like, we could never even guess as to the river's

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[23]Christopher Stone, "The Nonperson in Law," *Should Trees Have Standing? And Other Essays on Law, Morals and the Environment* 2nd ed. (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana, 1996), 61.

[24]Stone, "The Nonperson in Law," 62.

preferences (Might a particularly wild river prefer to be a lazy stream, at least on Sunday afternoons?). Future persons and comatose cases are similar enough to full persons that we are able to make reasonable guesses as to what they would want—not so with rivers.

Unlike Stone, Kenneth Goodpaster does not try to justify granting moral considerability to all living things simply by stretching the notion of experienceable interests. He offers two alternative arguments. First, he claims that because neither rationality nor sentience are necessary for moral considerability, the use of them to demarcate the morally valuable is arbitrary. Life is the only nonarbitrary characteristic by which to do this.[25] We might wonder, however, why he thinks being alive provides a *nonarbitrary* condition for moral worth. He seems to think that, unlike sentience, which leaves many animals and plants outside the moral circle, life captures everything which could plausibly be morally considerable, and is hence nonarbitrary. But why does being alive rather than not make something morally considerable? A line is still being drawn—this time between living and nonliving—and to make the case that this line is nonarbitrary he must give some additional argument.

One response might be that living things, unlike rocks or water, have interests or the capacity to experience. After all, it is difficult to describe why doing something to a being or object is a wrong to that being or object if it not only does not care, but *cannot*. But then it is not being alive that matters, even in the unlikely case that the class of living things turns out to be exactly coextensive with the class of experiencers or interest holders. Goodpaster wants to avoid sliding into a Singer or Regan-like account, however.

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[25]Kenneth E. Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable," *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 51.

He agrees that sentience is a sufficient condition for moral considerability, but rejects the view that it, or even potential sentience, is necessary: "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* . . ."[26] So, the experiential aspect of the notion of interests is dropped, as it seems it would have to be if we are talking about plants and algae.

Goodpaster attempts to bolster his case by arguing that sentience is an adaptive characteristic which provides protection for its bearers by helping them anticipate and avoid dangers, and therefore sentience is ancillary to something more important rather than being itself the thing which confers moral considerability. The experience of pleasure and pain, on this view, is not the goal of sentience, but something that "signals a job well done, but not the completion of the job."[27] So to repeat, Goodpaster, while agreeing with Singer and Regan that interests are what count, is trying to separate interests from experience. But we might wonder at this point if leaving sentience or experience behind is also to leave moral considerability behind. This seems to be the one overriding problem with Stone's and Goodpaster's life-ethics. The problem is explaining why one should care, morally speaking, about a "job well done" if there are no interests (in the usual sense), satisfactions, pain, or well-being, at stake—where "well done" refers to some biological process independent of any wanting, desiring, or even feeling. To complete the argument there must be some further account for why "getting the job done" (presumably, staying alive and reproducing) carries any moral weight whatsoever without

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[26]Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable," 56.

[27]Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable," 57.

someone or something else caring about it.

It is worth noting that Goodpaster is careful to avoid saying that the fact that plants have (non-experiential) interests makes them as morally significant as humans. The interests of sentient beings are of greater weight in cases of conflict. And indeed, this softens his position considerably. Nonetheless, it remains to be explained exactly how disinterested plants could have interests of the sort that matter morally. It might be that our commonsense intuitions point to individual plants as having standing, but the failure to account for why they do should give us reason to pause. Goodpaster's qualification regarding sentience might suggest that the life-ethic approach does little to change our thinking about our interactions with animals as the interests of sentient beings would remain the primary focus of moral reasoning. However, if the life-ethic is correct, it would complicate our moral lives in that we would have to reconsider our thinking about individual plants, algae, bacteria, and the like. Their biological "interests" would have to count in our moral deliberations.

Paul Taylor seeks firmer ground for a life-ethic by more richly describing the good of individual organisms in terms of their "biological powers," or capacities to cope with environmental challenges in order to be strong and healthy. An organism's well-being is, he argues, an end in itself, giving us a *prima facie* obligation to not harm it. The same can be said of populations or groups of organisms which reproduce and maintain stability across generations. Like Goodpaster, Taylor claims that "having a good of its own" does not necessarily mean that an organism has wants or interests in the usual sense. And again like his fellow life-ethicists, he motivates his case in part by appealing to ordinary language: we do say that trees can be harmed or benefitted by our actions.

But beyond this, it is the teleology of living things, understood in terms of natural selection, that gives legitimacy to such claims.[28]

Taylor continues by laying out three pieces of what he calls the "ethic of respect for nature": a belief system, an ultimate moral attitude, and a set of rules for conduct.[29] The belief system is to include lessons from ecology, such as that all life is interconnected and that (non-static) stability is a condition of organisms realizing their own good. We ought to derive a moral attitude of respect for all life from these beliefs, amounting to ascribing intrinsic value to all living things. Finally, a set of rules and standards would naturally follow by which we would evaluate our actions with respect to other living things. In short, empirical knowledge is to inform our ethical attitudes, which, in turn, are to provide the grounds for moral duties.

The material of the belief system is the facts we learn about the world, such as the interdependence of all life. It makes sense that such would inform our moral attitudes. However, as Hume warned, we cannot get an *ought* from an *is*—the stuff of the belief system cannot get us to the second and third stage by itself. And in fact, that is one of the worries with all three of the life ethics accounts described here: there is no clear argument for how we get a moral good or value from a description of how plants, etc., do in fact develop within particular eco-systems. There must be something more. Is it just that we like or need other living things? That we feel some sort of empathy for even plants "struggling" to survive? Taylor compares his three part complex to an ethics of

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[28]Paul W. Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature," *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 67.

[29]Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature," 69.

respect for humans. Here we develop a conception of ourselves and others as centers of autonomous choice. From this comes an attitude of respect for persons as persons; and finally, an ethical system of duties.[30] But, unlike his initial schema, here there is already an ethical claim built into the belief system, or somewhere unarticulated between the first and second stages, to the effect that to be a person is to have free will and all that goes with it—this stuff is morally relevant by any account, however it is that it gets worked out. The same is not obviously true of the empirical facts of ecology.

Autonomy and Moral Agency

This digression into a life-ethic challenge to Singer's and Regan's emphasis on experiential interests helps make the case that it is the experiences of individual entities that we must pay attention to when thinking about using them for our benefit. The focus on experience has the added advantage of making it easier to know what we need to do, or avoid doing, in our interactions with animals than would be the case under some vague notion of naturally selected teleology. Evaluating our use of nonhuman animals must take into account the fact that they can be benefitted or harmed in ways we take to be morally relevant with respect to ourselves. It seems, however, that most people have very strong intuitions that, contra Singer and Regan, we have much more serious obligations to fellow humans than to animals. Are there characteristics which humans (or at least most humans) possess that nonhuman animals do not that could explain or justify different treatment?

R. G. Frey argues that autonomy is such a characteristic. He does not think,

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[30]Ibid., 69.

however, that autonomy is the only morally relevant characteristic. In fact, he is careful to state that when it comes to cases of suffering, it is sentience and not autonomy which matters. But, when it comes to the taking of life, it is worse to kill an autonomous than a nonautonomous being because autonomy confers additional value upon an individual. If he is right, then we have another thing to consider in using animals to further our own wants and needs. Perhaps we would still not be allowed to use animals in painful experiments where we were not also willing to use humans, but when it comes to killing, we would have a way to argue for preferring to kill non-autonomous animals over autonomous humans—or, if autonomy comes in degrees, for preferring to kill those beings with less autonomy.

Autonomy makes a difference for Frey because it adds value to its possessor. It makes a life richer. There is something special, Frey argues, to "*our* making something of *our* lives," to "our *making* something of our lives," and to "our molding or shaping our lives in accordance with our ends or conception of the good life."[31] Happiness comes most fully through a sense of personal achievement, which is only possible if we are not slaves to our first order desires or the wishes of others. This is value conferring because value is a function of the quality of life.[32] Furthermore, the kind of autonomy he is talking about is not, Frey thinks, extendable to nonhuman animals. To attempt this would be to weaken the sense of autonomy such that it would lose the special meaning it has in human lives. Animals and nonautonomous humans may be able to initiate action in

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[31]R. G. Frey, "Autonomy and the Value of Animal Life," *The Monist* 70.1 (1987): 52-54. Emphasis in original.

[32]Ibid., 57.

pursuing basic needs and desires, but autonomous humans have the ability to order preferences in accordance with their views of the good life.[33] Frey sums up his view by stating: "Both a dog and a man may be the experiencing subjects of lives; yet, the man's life is both richer and richer through being a life that he has, in the appropriate sense, made for himself."[34]

It is not clear, however, that autonomy itself makes some beings more morally valuable than others. It is true that some people value their own lives less than do others and likely that highly autonomous people frequently value their own lives more as they have become more autonomous. But it is also quite possible that a less autonomous person might value her life just as much as, if not more than, a more autonomous person, especially where the more autonomous person is plagued by existential angst brought on by the realization of her freedom. Gary Comstock argues that increases in autonomy might actually diminish the quality of life for some because the value of personal autonomy clashes with the sometimes deeply held value of self-sacrifice.[35] Whether this is the case or not, Comstock points to the possibility that Frey's conception of a richer and more valuable life is biased in the direction of individualism and rationality at the expense of emotion and community. Furthermore, the autonomous man probably does think his life is more valuable than is the dog's. But of course this is from his perspective. Perhaps not being so autonomous makes the dog's life extra valuable for him or her. Steve Sapontzis adds that when we try to imagine what it is like to be a dog,

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[33]Ibid., 60-61.

[34]Ibid., 62.

[35]Gary Comstock, "The Moral Irrelevance of Autonomy," *Between the Species* 8.1 (1992): 21-23.

we end up thinking not of the animal, but of ourselves. We mistakenly think being a dog means being "a prisoner, a consciousness which is capable of doing a variety of things confined to a way of life which does not permit her to actualize those capacities, although she remains aware of these capacities and feels frustrated by the lack of opportunity to actualize them."[36]

Even if the lives of more autonomous individuals are deemed to be richer and more fulfilling, however, it is not clear that this makes such a person more morally considerable. Do we really think that as happiness or satisfaction with one's life increases so does the *value* of one's life? Frey seems to be mistaking a person liking her life more than she used to for that life being more valuable vis-à-vis other lives. It seems doubtful that we would want to say that the life of a melancholy artist is worth less, morally speaking, than that of a happily successful, self-employed millionaire, even if the artist were unhappy in large part due to her not having chosen to be an artist. More autonomous people do not seem to be more morally considerable.[37] And if degrees of autonomy do not distinguish between more or less morally considerable humans, we should not expect it to be useful in setting (most) humans apart from (most) other animals, unless, as seems doubtful, autonomy is an all-or-nothing sort of thing.

On the other hand, being autonomous might make one more open to ways of being harmed. In saying why killing an autonomous being is worse than killing a

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[36]Steve F. Sapontzis, "Response: Autonomy as an Excuse for All-Too-Human Chauvinism," *Between the Species* 8.1 (1992): 31.

[37]This is not to say that autonomy is not centrally important in ethical thinking. One obvious role it plays is in our evaluations of responsibility and accountability. Autonomous beings are also given room to make their own decisions, enjoying extra protection from interference, though this can be explained in terms of having interests in acting freely and being in control of ones own destiny.

nonautonomous being, Frey argues that the former sort of being has a concept of herself, can project herself into the future, has desires that extend into the future, and has a strong desire to go on living. To kill such a being is to cause harm in ways not possible with respect to the nonautonomous.[38] But described in this way, autonomy—or rather, other characteristics such as having a conception of oneself and projecting oneself into the future, which are necessary conditions for autonomy—is morally relevant because of its role in the possession of interests which can be furthered or thwarted. This complicates Singer's and Regan's more straightforward approach to experiential interests, but it does not fundamentally challenge them. An advantage of interpreting the relevance of autonomy in terms of interests is that it accounts for the commonsense belief that it is better to use animals than people for such things as early stage drug testing (though this is not an argument that animals *should* be so used). Second, it allows us to make finer-tuned distinctions regarding interests than either Singer's or Regan's account seems to allow, without introducing autonomy as an additional—and likely incommensurable—concern.

Perhaps there are other characteristics by which we can further refine our evaluations of our interactions with nonhuman animals. Martin Benjamin argues that although sentience is a sufficient condition for moral considerability, normal adult humans and perhaps some higher primates are more valuable than are other sentient creatures—i.e., greater justification must be given to override their interests. He argues

[38]Frey, "Autonomy and the Value of Animal Life," 51.

that the ability to use language[39] enables a being to reason, reflect, and see itself as a self enduring through time. Most normal adult humans, unlike most nonhuman animals and the seriously mentally disadvantaged have "the capacity to more or less transcend [their] particular world view and way of life and to view [themselves] and the world as a whole from a more detached or external standpoint."[40] It is language which enables us to do so by "bring[ing] possibilities before the mind."[41] Neither the use of language nor the resulting abilities mentioned, however, are what make the moral difference. Rather, this enables such beings, which possess what Benjamin calls "reflective consciousness," to be *moral agents*. That is, by being reflectively conscious, as opposed to having only "simple consciousness," one can evaluate choices according to their consequences in ways which are not purely egoistic. This makes one a moral agent, or a "person," and it is this which gives reflectively conscious beings their special worth.[42]

This makes good sense. But is it the case that being a moral agent makes one more morally considerable, and if so why? Benjamin is no doubt right to think that moral agency depends upon the ability to reflect and make choices, which in turn depends upon the ability to use complex language, or at least some high-level language of thought. Moral reasoning is, after all, a highly abstract activity; one must identify oneself and others as distinct yet importantly related, must be able to weigh options as hypotheticals,

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[39]The ability to use language should not be confused with the ability to communicate, which could include insects changing color to signal breeding receptiveness or bees dancing to indicate the location of nectar.

[40]Martin Benjamin, *Splitting the Difference: Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics* (Lawrence, KS: U P of Kansas, 1990), 96.

[41]Stuart Hampshire, as quoted in Benjamin, "Ethics and Animal Consciousness," 497.

[42]Benjamin, "Ethics and Animal Consciousness," 497 and 498.

and must be able to make sense of things like justice, fairness, forgiveness, and the like.[43] Benjamin appeals further to our commonsense intuitions by claiming that those moral agents who fail to act in morally acceptable ways, for instance by not sacrificing their own trivial tastes or desires to avoid causing others harm, forfeit some of their higher moral status.[44]

The claim that moral agency, or personhood, makes a being specially valuable has a long history (Benjamin himself cites Locke) and fits with commonsense moral belief. What we need, however, is an explanation for why it does so. One possibility has already been mentioned by Frey: beings with the abilities which make autonomy possible—which turn out, not surprisingly since autonomy is a prerequisite to moral agency, to be the ones which also make moral agency possible—are open to being harmed in ways others are not. Reflective consciousness enables a being to see itself as existing through time, which in turn makes it possible to have needs and desires which are projected into the future. It so happens that this also makes those of us with such abilities subject to a great deal of fear and anxiety about the future—perhaps most importantly, about ceasing to exist. Reflective consciousness, then, makes it possible to be harmed in more ways or more deeply.[45] Animals avoid being killed, but it is unlikely that many (if any) nonhuman animals fear death, *per se*: fear of being killed is not the

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[43]One need not suppose that the traditional Western, perhaps overly intellectualized, emphasis on individuality and universality is the right way to think about ethics in order to agree that morality demands reflection of the sort that makes it possible to see oneself and others as beings with interests existing through time and the ability to sometimes set aside one's self-directed desires in order to benefit others.

[44]Benjamin, "Ethics and Animal Consciousness," 498.

[45]Although he is not arguing the point I am, John Stuart Mill notes that, "A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type." *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett P, 1979), 9.

same as the existential fear of annihilation. Similarly, the harm of caging an animal might be rather severe, but doing the same to a person involves not only confinement, but the fear of what horrors might occur next and the realization that one's projects are on hold and one's relationships with others are cut off. On this interpretation, as with autonomy, it is not the moral considerability or value of entities that increases, but the number and significance of certain interests. In other words, the interests of normal adult humans do not gain in moral weight simply due to their being moral agents. Rather, the interests of everyone are considered on the same scale of trivial-to-vital, though normal adult humans and cognitively and emotionally complex nonhuman animals have especially extensive sets of quite significant interests.

If this is right, and interests are the key to understanding the need to provide greater justification to override many of the interests of normal adult humans, then Benjamin has provided us with a useful way to think through commonsense moral beliefs regarding our interactions with nonhuman animals even accepting Singer's and Regan's general emphasis on experiential interests as the relevant moral considerability-conferring property. It is not entirely clear, though, that this is what Benjamin was primarily trying to get at. After all, in his account it is moral agency itself which is morally relevant, and not the necessary conditions for moral agency and the related possible benefits and harms. And, agency itself marks a difference in moral considerability. He does not, however, offer an argument for why this is so, but neither does Locke in his description of personhood.[46] Absent an explanation, we might wonder why our being able to morally

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[46]Benjamin, "Ethics and Animal Consciousness," 498. (Benjamin had cited for support *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; Bk. Two; Ch. XXVII; Sec. 9).

evaluate our actions with respect to animals makes us more morally considerable than they, if not simply because we can be harmed in more and deeper ways.

Conclusion

Earlier I had argued that a key element in our thinking about our use of nonhuman animals to meet human interests is the notion of trivial-to-vital needs and wants. As mentioned, Benjamin relies on this as well. This distinction might be useful even in cases where the question of moral considerability does not arise, though how we answer that latter question will, in many instances, set the parameters for how the trivial-to-vital continuum gets applied. If we follow the experiential interests account and hold that all with such interests count equally, then the trivial-to-vital interests of various beings should be weighted similarly. For Singer, all sentient creatures count equally at the beginning of a utility calculation. For Regan, all experiencing subjects of a life have equal claims to rights—i.e., equal claims to have their most vital interests protected. Whatever or whoever falls below the moral considerability threshold does not enjoy this equality (for Singer this line would be much further "down" the list of animals arranged according to their cognitive and experiential abilities than it would for Regan). If autonomy, moral agency, or the like, makes a difference to moral considerability, then those with these characteristics would likely get to have their trivial and vital interests weighted more heavily than those who do not.

With respect to moral considerability, I believe that what makes the greatest difference—what we need to pay the most attention to prior to describing particular competing interests in terms of trivial or vital—is the ability to be harmed in an

experiential way. This establishes a base-line of considerability. Autonomy, language use, seeing oneself as a self through time, and moral agency do not directly influence this judgment. However, as I have indicated, these characteristics do play a less direct role. They do so by making it possible for most humans and some more highly developed nonhuman animals to be harmed or bettered in more ways, or to a greater extent than those without these characteristics (which should probably be thought of in terms of degrees of possession). In other words, autonomous, rational, etc., beings have more vital interests (and perhaps more trivial ones as well). Having a sense of self existing through time, for example, means that one's well-being involves projects, more complex kinds of relationships with others, and hopes, fears, dreams, and anxieties about these and other matters.

One problem with appealing to differences in moral considerability in addition to ways and the extent to which one can be harmed or bettered is that there is no obvious way, precision aside, to know how much weight should be added to or subtracted from our evaluations of interests made in terms of trivial or vital. We are talking about two different sorts of weighing—one at the level of moral considerability and one done by noting the degree of vitalness of particular interests. This is not to say, though, that we could make no comparisons or judgments. But one advantage of the view laid out here is that there would be no need, when considering differences of vitalness of interests, to also worry about how to adjust these up or down to reflect differing degrees of moral considerability (that is, once we have established that the entities involved are morally considerable because they have experiential interests).

It might be objected that on this account some humans do not count as much as

would, for example, an adult ape. After all, adult apes appear to be more cognitively developed, and hence potentially more autonomous, etc., than are human infants and the severely mentally disabled. In response, I would say first that all humans, and indeed all animals who can be harmed in morally relevant ways (not as plants and rocks can be "harmed"), are equal in moral considerability—infants are not *less* so than apes. But, the objector is not likely to be satisfied; equality of moral considerability is not good enough. In a case where we would have to decide between the life of an infant (or mentally disadvantaged adult) and that of an ape, we should, all else being equal, choose to save the infant. To this I would agree, but argue that no appeal to difference in moral considerability is needed to explain this intuition. Rather, we can appeal to an infant's value to other humans, special obligations to family, the belief that treating all humans well protects us all in case we become mentally disabled, or to an infant's cognitive and emotive potential (though this last possibility would raise questions of when potentiality of certain traits begins and would leave out the irreparably mentally disabled).

It is important not to oversimplify our task. We need not think that, once we have identified the morally considerable beings, weighing interests limits us to weighing particular interests simpliciter—we can weigh them as elements of a life or a life project. Ethical evaluations are not simply calculations of interests identified independent of the lives of those involved. In other words, ethical evaluations should always take context into account. Furthermore, interests need not be seen as things identifiable *a priori*, or even empirically in terms of species. Such might be acceptable when dealing with less social and less complex non-human animals (or even human infants), but normal adult human interests often vary greatly due to their social origin and complexity. Interests

arise within cultural settings, change through dialogue, and do not form neat consistent sets. To say that individuals are morally considerable due to their having interests is not necessarily, then, to think in atomistic terms.

I have, in short, agreed with Singer and Regan in thinking that all who have experiential interests are morally considerable and are equally so,[47] but have also drawn lessons from Frey and Benjamin to argue that certain key traits are morally relevant when it comes to using the notion of trivial-to-vital interests. I have disagreed with Frey and Benjamin to the extent that they seem to describe these traits as providing grounds for distinction in terms of moral considerability or intrinsic value. There remain many questions regarding morally acceptable ways of interaction between humans and nonhuman animals. For example, should we think of killing in different terms than we do suffering? Does killing demand different sorts of justification? Can we kill if doing so causes no suffering? In light of which overall moral theory or combination of theories should decisions be made? These and other questions must be explored further in order for us to have a more solid answer to the question of how we should evaluate our interactions with other individual entities.

Noticing that the possession of experiential interests identifies those entities who are morally considerable is an important first step, however, in constructing a Humean pluralistic environmental ethic. Such an approach relies on reasoned arguments to limit the range of possible moral claims in order to avoid falling into an unacceptable

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[47]Although I have pushed Singer and Regan together in order to both argue for the importance of experiential interests and to make the point that we do not have to be whole-hogging utilitarians to make use of the notion of being harmed and bettered, in fact I would agree with Singer that it is the capacity to suffer generally (being careful not to restrict this to something so simple as pain and pleasure) that is the most morally relevant in thinking about moral considerability. Regan's emphasis on "higher" cognitive abilities seems to be more importantly related to the lessons drawn from Frey and Benjamin.

relativism. This discussion of the moral considerability of *individual* entities is meant to do some of that work in the context of thinking about the individualism–holism debate in environmental philosophy. What has been said here will also provide a needed point of critique of Mary Anne Warren's principle-based approach to moral standing and the individualism–holism problem, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

MARY ANNE WARREN'S PRINCIPLE-BASED SOLUTION TO THE INDIVIDUALISM-HOLISM PROBLEM

Introduction

In the previous chapter I had argued that the possession of interests is what makes individuals morally considerable. I had also, though, acknowledged the intuition that all living things, even those without interests, may have some prima facie considerability. I do think it wrong to, without good reason, destroy even plants or algae, but remain unsatisfied with the arguments offered in support of this intuition. I am also sympathetic to the claim that autonomy, moral agency, and seeing oneself as a self are morally significant characteristics which mark a difference between those who are reflectively and those who are simply conscious. However, I had argued that these characteristics do not themselves confer moral considerability, but instead point to their bearers as capable of being harmed or helped in more ways, or to a greater extent, than those without. This is consistent with Peter Singer's and Tom Regan's view that humans are not the only ones who count morally, though it, more than theirs, makes explicit the commonsense belief that the interests of normal adult humans carry some special weight over those of most other animals. Finally, interests can be compared on a scale of trivial to vital without assuming a more specific common scale to which every value or interest is reducible. In addition, interests should not be thought of independently of context or community, or as isolated from lives or life projects.

With all this as the backdrop, this chapter will explore Mary Anne Warren's

multiple-criterial approach to moral considerability and her principle-based approach to moral reasoning as her response to the individualism–holism problem. Warren believes that various sources of value will lead to moral principles which, although incommensurable, are not necessarily inconsistent and are, in fact, rankable. The principles embrace all living things, sentient beings, humans (as autonomous beings), and ecosystems. Because her principles cover both individuals and wholes and because they are rankable, she believes she has provided a way to bridge the individualism–holism divide in a way that does not derive the moral considerability of one sort of entity from the other (she does not, for example, argue that the moral considerability of individual animals is based solely on their role within their respective ecosystems). Furthermore, she believes her system of ranked principles avoids the relativistic tendency of a pluralistic ethics. She also seems to think that given the diversity of principles, sources of value, and the sorts of entities which are morally considerable, it is best to avoid commitments at the level of moral theory, as no moral theory has yet been able to account for all this variety.

Although Warren's principle-based approach is attractive as an answer to the individualism–holism problem, I will argue for some alterations and a reorganization of her principles to fit with the claims of the previous chapters—especially that of the centrality of interests with its trivial-to-vital continuum. I will also argue, though, that her principles can be better supported as a coherent package if we do pursue work at the "higher" levels of theory or meta-theory. At one point she appeals to J. Baird Callicott's use of Hume's ethics to argue for the inclusion of ecosystems among the set of morally considerable entities, resulting in one of her several principles. However, elsewhere she

steers clear of using moral theory to develop her views. Although I think she is right not to depend upon utilitarianism or Kantianism (because neither could get her a set of principles accounting for both individualistic and holistic concerns), the Humean approach she uses in one place might be usefully applied to all of her work. I will argue in latter chapters that Callicott's already developed Humean approach can be joined with Warren's principles. In fact, Callicott's otherwise more abstract theory is as in need of the substantive element Warren's principles could supply as her work is in need of Callicott's Humean framework. Callicott's environmental ethic will be the primary focus of later chapters. The job of this chapter is to reformulate Warren's principles in a way consistent with the conclusions of Chapter Two regarding interests and the moral considerability of individual organisms in order to later use them in concert with Callicott's Humean environmental ethic. Making Warren's principles consistent with this central role of interests, however, takes away her justification for ranking the principles. Conflicts between them, and therefore with respect to evaluations of particular cases, will exist with no obvious available solution.

As with the previous chapter, the conclusions here sets limits to the range of possible moral claims that can be made, in this case, in a pluralistic account otherwise susceptible to charges of relativism. The work here demonstrates that despite the existence of rationally irreducible difference inherent in my revisions of Warren's approach (due to a lack of ordering criteria for the proposed principles), progress can nonetheless be made in terms of sorting out our moral beliefs and values.

Picking interests out as the most important property conferring moral considerability to individuals does not decide much regarding how we should proceed in making moral evaluations: interests are only one element of a much larger picture, and the possession of them says nothing specific about how we should count or weigh them against one another in particular cases.[1] Some of the difficulty lies in the fact that the notion of interests is fairly generic. We have aesthetic, religious, and social interests in addition to the common needs of food, shelter, and clothing. We have varying desires to foster and maintain relationships and inclinations to become certain sorts of people. We have interests in dignity, in integrity, and in learning about the world. We often have difficulty counting and weighing these against one another in our own lives—trouble deciding, for example, whether to spend time developing our musical ability or working late at the office in hopes of greater financial security. This becomes all the more difficult when we begin to consider other people's interests. Gaging the interests of third parties is especially difficult once the diversity of possible interests and ways of putting these together and ranking them are admitted. Differences between proximate and long-term interests further complicate matters. On the face of it, then, we do not simply look at the world, count interests, and make moral evaluations based on weighing these against one another.

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[1]This emphasis on interests is meant primarily to pick out those beings who must be taken into account by moral agents. It is an early step in moral thinking, but one in need of answering because traditional ethics simply assumed that humans are the only ones who count. Second, the emphasis on interests does not mean that ethics is only about the resolution of conflicts between competing individuals. Ethics is also concerned with the development of people and societies, as well as cooperative decisions and caring relationships. Interests, though, are intimately connected with each of these concerns. Finally, this use of the notion of interests should not commit us to an atomistic individualism. Interests are, especially for humans, grounded in, and shaped by, relationships and cultural situations.

This does not mean that we can make no comparisons between conflicting interests—in fact, we do it all the time. I may not know exactly how to compare the development of musical talents and financial security, yet I do make such choices and can often evaluate these as better or worse. Rather, the variety of kinds of interests (aesthetic, material, etc.), the diversity of actual sets of interests and rankings within those sets, and the difficulty we have in counting and weighing interests suggests that there is no single scale allowing us to simply apply some formula to determine which interests, or sets there of, are more weighty than others. That is, the great variety of interests do not seem reducible to some common value—certainly not to happiness or pleasure, which often seem not to play the central role in our evaluations of actions such as promise keeping. It might be suggested that interests are reducible to preferences, but this amounts simply to a renaming rather than a reduction, at most reminding us that interests are not free floating but belong to individuals. We would be left with aesthetic, material, etc., preferences standing in the same non-reducible relationship to the supposedly simpler elements of happiness, pleasure, or the like, as did interests. These problems are familiar to utilitarians who attempt to traffic in a single value such as happiness, or even preference satisfaction—not everything valuable is reducible to happiness, and not all preferences are commensurable. We value, or have interests with respect to different kinds of things (money, beauty, friendship) and in different ways (jobs are important for money, a sense of accomplishment, and the relationships formed; art is valuable for its aesthetic, social, political, and even monetary benefits).

The notion of trivial-to-vital interests can play a role here: we can talk of interests as being more or less central to an entity's well-being without saying that all interests are

reducible to some common value. Food and shelter are vital needs for most any animal, while pleasure from play is typically a bit less so. There is enough vagueness built into the notion of trivial-to-vital interests to avoid the temptation of assuming a single scale, yet enough precision, found at least in our commonsense usage, to allow for rough comparisons. Some such comparisons are easily made. Without assuming a common comparable value, I can decide with clarity that watching one's child's piano recital should be chosen over watching one's favorite television program. The trivial-to-vital continuum becomes a less useful tool, however, in making choices where the vitalness of the interests involved in two options are very close. On the other hand, noting such closeness is often important if only to make us see that neither option is the obviously right choice.

Picking a particular moral theory might help to sort things out, as utilitarians, deontologists, contractarians, and care-ethicists would differ in their thinking about interests. The claim that interests are what make a being morally considerable, however, does not itself specify which moral theory to use. Interests play a central role in every moral theory since each depends on the idea that it is impossible to harm or better someone or something who not only does not care, but cannot care. Rights protect that which matters most to their bearers; contracts are made over those things important enough to bother with; caring for others means acting in ways consistent with their interests; and so forth. Ethics is about deciding how to act and how to become the sorts of beings we wish to be, none of which matters in the absence of someone being interested in the outcomes of our thinking and acting.

Approaching the matter from the opposite direction—that is, picking a theory

prior to considering the role which interests would play—gets us no further since the verdict is still out as to which of the competing ethical theories, if any, is correct. They each isolate aspects of moral life and thinking which correspond to our central moral beliefs. The problem is that they do so at the exclusion of the other views, thereby inevitably also leaving out some of what we think ethics is all about. Utilitarianism, for example, posits a single Good—utility—the maximization of which is the only goal of ethical behavior. Some utilitarians try to avoid otherwise unacceptable results of their theory, such as that it would require the conviction and punishment of innocent people when this would maximize utility, by showing that such acts would not in fact maximize utility. But although there do seem to be cases where the right choice is whatever would satisfy the greatest number of people the most (perhaps, for example, when deciding issues of distribution of medical care), failing to maximize utility is not always the reason some things are wrong. W. D. Ross points out that, "When a plain man fulfils a promise because he thinks he ought to do so, it seems clear that he does so with no thought of its total consequences, still less with any opinion that these are likely to be the best possible." Such a person is not so much looking toward future consequences, but to his or her past action of promise making.[2] Treating other morally considerable beings as mere means to our ends is morally repugnant regardless of considerations of utility. On the other hand, it should not be said that rights always trump consequentialist reasons

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[2]W. D. Ross, "The Right and The Good," *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie (New York: Oxford U P, 1998), 487. Bernard Williams objects to utilitarianism on similar grounds: "It is naturally characteristic of utilitarianism that its results depend on calculations . . . . If racist prejudice is directed toward a small minority by a majority that gets enough satisfaction from it, it could begin to be touch and go whether racism might not be justified. The point is not how likely that is to arise, or in what circumstances, but that the whole question of how many racists are involved cannot begin to be an acceptable consideration on the question whether racism is acceptable . . . ." Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1985), 86.

either. The good of the community sometimes outweighs individual rights. Singer's utilitarian and Regan's animal rights approaches to animal welfare, for example, are then both right: consequences do matter *and* there are certain core interests in need of special, though not absolute, protection because they matter so much to those beings to whom they belong.

The fact that interests are the property most significant to the identification of morally considerable beings does not, then, suggest the correctness of any one of the received moral theories. Nor are there independent reasons identifying one as the overwhelming favorite. We can neither start with the notion that interests are important to then find the preferred theory to assist in making decisions in particular cases, nor start with moral theory to order our thinking about moral considerability and interests to make decisions in particular cases. Because the competing theories each capture some but not all of the important aspects of moral thinking, but are mutually exclusive of one another, we need to ask ourselves under which conditions we are to use any particular approach or when one trumps the others. Is there a covering model to direct us? Is there an alternative theory not yet developed which will incorporate the best of each existing theory, somehow synthesizing them and neutralizing their exclusivity? Or, is looking to theory traditionally construed the wrong way to organize our thinking about ethics? There are several possible solutions to the problem arising from the variety of interests and ways of thinking about them in conjunction with making moral evaluations:

1. Make one of the received ethical theories work better
2. Develop an alternative theory to those we have which combines the good parts of each

3. Develop a covering model to say when to use each of the theories we like
4. Accept pluralism at the level of theory (no single theory or covering model sorting out the competing theories)
5. Set the issue of theory aside and try to work at the level of principles (and when we get better at this, maybe try again to fix the theory problem according to one of suggestions 1-4)

Much work has been done trying to make one of the popular received theories better capture our commonsense moral intuitions. However, there seems to be no end in sight for the debate between, for example, Kantianism and utilitarianism (the two most popular theories), with disputants continuing to raise ever more sophisticated counter examples against their opponents. I wish to leave the details of this debate aside, but take the stalemate to indicate a failure of suggestion (1). Suggestions (2) and (3) are problematic because the competing theories are so inconsistent with one another. Each theory involves a quite different approach to ethics: an entirely inconsistent "metaphysics of morals" as Callicott puts it.[3] We cannot, after all, without simply discarding the insights of deontological theories, decide to use rights only whenever doing so would bring about the best consequences for the greatest number. It remains to be seen whether it is possible (suggestion (2)) to pick out certain central elements of each to create a coherent and balanced alternative theory. Rule utilitarianism might be the closest approximation, but even this remains solidly utilitarian. It might, for example, require granting people certain rights or protections even if in some cases harming them would lead to greater utility; but the rationale for such rules would nonetheless remain one of

[3]J. Baird Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 12.2 (1990): 123.

maximizing utility. In contrast, pluralism and "principlism"[4] (not mutually exclusive concepts) have not yet undergone such extensive development, thus making them worth further exploration. A pluralism in which principles *and theory* are important is my preferred solution. But first I want to explore a principle-based approach which seeks to avoid work at the level of theory.

There are many examples of principlist approaches in ethics, such as that of W. D. Ross and, more recently in medical ethics, of Tom Beauchamp and James Childress. Ross, having rejected utilitarianism and Kantianism, offers seven prima facie duties by which to evaluate actions: duties of fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and non-maleficence.[5] These duties, expressed as principles, are not reducible to simpler duties, values, or interests (some, in fact, seem more Kantian, while others, such as beneficence, more consequentialist), and are not lexically ordered (though he thinks that in general we have greater obligations to not cause harm than to help others). We come to know this set of principles[6] as self-evident, but only after paying careful attention to which elements of particular cases seem most relevant to our moral judgments. Furthermore, we cannot decide cases a priori—we need to know the

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[4]"Principlism" was the term originally coined by Danner Clouser and Bernard Gert as a disdainful label for Beauchamp and Childress's principle-based account (James F. Childress, "Principlism," *Encyclopedia of Ethics* 2nd ed., ed. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1377-1381.) That the 2001 *Encyclopedia of Ethics* contains an entry entitled "Principlism" that is not meant disdainfully shows that the term is outgrowing its original negative connotation. I will use "principlism" and "principle-based approach" interchangeably.

[5]Ross, "The Right and The Good," 488-89.

[6]Ross's principles could be described as a "pluralism" of principles because they are not reducible to a single common element. However, Ross is not a pluralist in a more interesting sense: he thinks that his set of principles generates single correct answers to each moral problem. Despite this claim, it seems likely that such a diverse set of principles could generate a variety of rationally defensible but inconsistent and non-reducible answers, and so be pluralistic in ways not admitted by Ross.

situational details to be able to determine which principles are the most relevant. When principles conflict ("prima facie" refers to their initial appearance of applicability), we need to make a judgment based on all of the relevant considerations to determine our "duty proper," or actual duty. In cases where we determine that it is morally required that we break a promise, for example, we do not dismiss the prima facie duty to keep our promises; in fact, we typically think we need to somehow make up for even justified broken promises.[7]

In summary, on Ross's account, we learn our prima facie duties from paying attention to what seems to matter most, morally speaking, in particular cases, but because these duties sometimes conflict, we must make final decisions not by applying theory but by acts of judgment. Beauchamp and Childress's view resembles Ross's but differs in their specific principles and in the justification for them—they see their principles as arising out of shared moral commitments between otherwise competing moral views.[8]

Principle approaches—certainly Ross's and Beauchamp and Childress's—are typically directed to human-human interactions. Warren goes further and develops principles which also take seriously the moral considerability of nonhuman animals, all living things, and ecosystems. She argues for a multi-criterial approach to moral considerability, where several properties (not just interests) confer moral considerability to their bearers. These different sources of value suggest and justify, she thinks, a variety

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[7]Ross, "The Right and The Good," 492-93.

[8]Tom Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989). See also: James F. Childress, "A Principle-based Approach," *A Companion to Bioethics*, ed. Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 61-71.

of non-reducible principles. Like Ross, she believes that single answers to particular cases can be had despite the variety of principles involved.

Mary Anne Warren's Principle-Based Approach

Warren's basic strategy is to argue against four uni-criterial—life only, sentience only, relational only, and moral agency only—views of moral status and then move to include elements of each in a multi-criterial approach. From these different ways in which entities can be morally considerable, she develops seven guiding principles: the Respect for Life, Anti-Cruelty, Agent's Rights, Human Rights, Ecological, Interspecific, and Transitivity of Respect principles. These principles are ordered insofar as they operationalize moral considerability-conferring criteria and thereby reflect the relative importance of each of these criteria. In this way, they are not, as Ross thinks, self evident, nor do they, as Beauchamp and Childress think, reflect the overlapping or common ground of competing views.

Warren defines moral status (or moral considerability) as that which makes an entity an object "towards which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations." We cannot do just whatever we want with respect to such things, but must take their interests or well-being into account.[9] In addition, she says that the concept of moral status should be regarded as a "blunt tool" to establish minimum standards of behavior prohibiting harm and requiring aid within limits, and that it is directed at members of groups rather

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[9]Mary Anne Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1997), 3.

than at specific individuals.[10] This description of moral status is well within the current usage of the term and is very close, if not identical, to how I have been using it here. Her characterization of moral considerability as a blunt tool fits also with my use of the somewhat vague notion of trivial-to-vital interests. What is more novel is her claim that there is no single criterion to account for all ascriptions of moral status and the breadth of entities this approach identifies as morally considerable. Warren argues that this view has important advantages over single-criterion approaches in that it fits commonsense views regarding moral obligation and it allows us to make attributions of moral status to not only individual interest-bearing beings, but to all living things, as well as wholes such as species and ecosystems. Finally, she hopes this multi-criterial approach will help us avoid moral pluralism originating at the level of theory. For Warren, the relative importance of various moral considerability-conferring properties provide a ranking of the resulting principles and hence lessens the chance for irresolvable conflicts between them. To allow for pluralism would force us to admit that we are doomed to live with permanent, rationally irreducible moral disagreement.

As mentioned, I will argue for some revisions of Warren's principles, consistent with work done in the previous chapter, and suggest that despite their appeal as elements of a principlist approach to ethics which sidelines or eliminates theory, these principles serve better as part of a reflective equilibrium approach which includes discussions of particular cases, principles, *and* theory. But in addition, because the changes I suggest rest on the belief that the possession of interests is what makes individual organisms

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[10]Ibid., 9 and 13.

morally considerable, Warren is left with little ground for ranking her principles, and hence for expecting no conflict between them.

A. The Respect for Life Principle

"Living organisms are not to be killed or otherwise harmed, without good reasons that do not violate principles 2-7."[11]

Albert Schweitzer famously saw being alive as not only necessary and sufficient for moral status, but as sufficient for *full* moral status. His position can be summed up by his claim that "I am a life that wills to live in the midst of life that wills to live,"[12] and his assertion that thinking one sort of living thing is worth more than another (e.g., animals over plants) is to rely merely on our prejudices. The first claim is his argument that life confers moral status and the second that this moral status is had by all living things equally. Warren rightly discredits this view on several grounds. For instance, she points out that we have no reason to believe that all living things have a "will to live," at least in the sense that this means having, minimally, a desire for pleasure and fear of pain.[13] She also complains that "radical biological egalitarianism" of this sort is practically impossible to accept. A full range of human actions, from food preparation to medical care, involves the killing of other organisms. The move to avoid the problem by allowing killing when it serves vital human needs is plagued by the fact that reasoning so with respect to plants and animals means doing so also with respect to other humans. If life is

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[11]Ibid., 149.

[12]Ibid., 31.

[13]Ibid., 34-35.

the only criterion by which entities gain moral status and it provides it equally, our need for food could be met with similar moral consequences by plants *or* by other people—a *reductio* against the life only account.[14]

Warren does not, however, want to entirely discard Schweitzer's sentiments. Being alive is sufficient, though not necessary, she thinks, for *some* moral status. Her positive argument for this claim is that it is consistent with the commonsense view that there is not a category of "worthless" life which could be destroyed by moral agents without good reason.[15] Her Respect for Life principle reflects her belief that life is a sufficient condition for moral considerability as well as her belief that other properties, as reflected in principles 2-6, make it possible for their bearers to kill and harm some fellow living entities.

Warren is right to be critical of Schweitzer's life-only account. However, her positive argument for nevertheless including life as one criterion among others is not particularly persuasive. As I indicated earlier, I am sympathetic with the claim that being alive confers value. How far this intuition ought to move us toward accepting life as a sufficient condition for moral status is, however, uncertain. Even if Warren is right that commonsense morality includes the belief that there is no category of worthless life, it would be preferable to be able to explain *why* this commonsense view is right rather than to simply accept it, especially when commonsense morality also says that we can only

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[14]To clarify, one could argue that life confers moral considerability equally but that when it comes to making moral evaluations of particular cases, we should pay attention to the vitalness of interests involved. This, it would seem, could allow humans to use some nonhuman animals and plants. However, this nullifies any moral standing plants would enjoy in a life-ethic because they do not have interests in the relevant sense.

[15]Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, 49.

injure those things which care about what happens to them, and not all living things seem to care. Warren, in fact, seems to accept this contrary view also, when she asks rhetorically, "If bacteria do not care about their own goals, then why should *we* care about these goals?"[16] She resolves this apparent inconsistency by taking the truth of both as indicating that the obligations we owe living things *qua* living things are not reducible to their having interests.

However, with no additional argumentation it is not clear that this is how the matter should be resolved, especially given the extent to which the commonsense belief that there is no category of "worthless life" is questionable (consider viruses). "Worthless" means to her here that an entity is not an object of our own moral obligation, or that it does not possess value independent of beings who might value it. However, to call something "worthless" in everyday parlance is to say not that it is neutral in value, but that it is bad, or has negative value. When we say that a tool, for example, is worthless, we are complaining: not only is it not useful, but we are *irritated* that it is not useful. If we are more careful and ask whether there could be living things which do not have positive value, or are neutral with respect to value or moral status (rather than asking if something is *disagreeable* just because it is alive), it is less clear that the commonsense answer would be as Warren thinks.

Warren's caveat that harm to living things might sometimes be acceptable casts further doubt on the relation between being alive and moral considerability. She admits that it is unclear what gets to count as a good reason for harming or killing something living, as the fact of being alive itself gives us little information about an entity's moral

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[16]Ibid., 48 (emphasis in original).

status. She says that the strength of such reasons must be evaluated according to additional factors, such as sentience, its relation to other things, and whether it is a moral agent.[17] Given this concession, however, it is not clear why she would insist that it is life itself that is morally relevant. By her own take, it seems that life matters only insofar as it is (contingently) necessary for something to be sentient, a moral agent, etc.

Warren also supplies a pragmatic argument for the Respect for Life principle. In our concern to protect species in order to prevent future loss to ourselves, we are well advised to insist on the Respect for Life principle. It makes, she thinks, "more than a verbal difference whether we believe, on the one hand, that all living things have a claim to our consideration, however modest; or, on the other hand, that plants and other non-sentient life forms should be protected only when they have demonstrable value to human beings."[18]

This pragmatic argument does not, however, make the case that all living things are in fact morally considerable. We could interpret her pragmatic argument as saying that those of us "in the know" know better, but we should nevertheless convince everyone else (and in the process, maybe even ourselves) that life confers moral considerability in order to manipulate behavior. But this seems more than a bit disingenuous, indicating that this is not the correct interpretation of Warren's argument. Although she does not make it clear, I take it that she means instead that life does in fact confer value and that we have pragmatic reasons to make this explicit. Such an argument only works, however, if we already agree on the moral considerability-conferring quality of life. An alternative,

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[17]Ibid., 149.

[18]Ibid., 150.

for those of us who remain less than convinced by the various life-ethics accounts is to take her pragmatic argument not as having anything to do with the moral considerability of all living things, but as justifying her Respect for Life principle derivatively from the interests of others. However, grounding the principle in this way makes it unlikely that all living things would have (even this derivative) standing; likely not many viruses or bacteria. On the other hand, Warren's caveat that harm could legitimately be done to living things *qua* living things with few interests might also suggest that because killing viruses and bacteria would benefit others with greater moral considerability (reflected in her subsequent principles), doing so would be, in line with commonsense, morally acceptable.

In the end, then, the Respect for Life principle fits with the commonsense view that all life is prima facie valuable, though the strength of this conviction is, as mentioned, questionable once more carefully explored. Perhaps the best argument for life itself conferring value has to do with our uncertainty of whether life exists elsewhere in the universe—the rarity pushes us to err on the side of caution when wondering whether to harm or destroy living things. This argument protects individual living entities only to the extent that doing so impacts the number and diversity of living things. In any case, instrumentalist arguments citing potential benefits to interested entities can point to Warren's Respect for Life principle as important to keep as is, though subsumed under a principle (such as the one below) concerned with the moral relevance of interests.

B. The Anti-Cruelty Principle

"Sentient beings are not to be killed or subjected to pain or suffering, unless there is no

other feasible way of furthering goals that are (1) consistent with principles 3-7; and (2) important to human beings, or other entities that have a stronger moral status than can be based on sentience alone."[19]

Warren turns second to the sentience-only view of Peter Singer, according to which attributions of moral status are based on the ability to enjoy pleasure and suffer pain, where this includes emotions, moods, etc.[20] As a utilitarian, Singer takes sentience as the property relevant to the morally obligatory aim of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. And because moral evaluations ought to be made from a universal perspective (to hold my interests as more important than someone else's is mere prejudice), he thinks the comparative interests of all sentient beings should be treated equally. Warren objects to the exclusive focus on interests on four grounds, each of which warrants a response ensuring that Warren's principles remain consistent with the conclusions of the previous chapter that interests are the most morally relevant characteristic for the moral standing of individuals.

Warren first complains that the sentience-only view does not allow, as many environmentalists wish, for ascriptions of moral status to such things as species and ecosystems. Leopold, for example, thinks we owe obligations to ecological community members.[21] But the sentience-only view would not, she argues, allow for a tree to have more moral status than a wild radish, which apparently she thinks would be the case for

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[19]Ibid., 152.

[20]Warren points out that we should say *ability* to enjoy pleasure and suffer pain in order to allow those not currently feeling (e.g., if sleeping) to nonetheless count as sentient, though should not say *potential* to enjoy pleasure, etc., because this would allow newly fertilized ova to count as sentient. We should maintain the distinction between sleeping but otherwise sentient and the not yet sentient entities. Ibid., 55.

[21]Ibid., 71.

an environmentalist view such as Leopold's.[22] More importantly, she complains that a theory which does not allow for direct moral consideration to the plants of an ecosystem flies in the face of common intuitions, such as that of John Rodman: "I find it as odd to think that the plants [of the California coastal chaparral] have value only for the happiness of the dusky-footed woodrats as to think that the dusky-footed woodrats have value only for the happiness of humans."[23] Theories attributing moral status to sentient beings could account for the woodrats' moral status; the difficulty is doing so for things such as plants.

One way to interpret a Leopoldian ethic, however, is to say that moral status depends upon an entity's role in the overall health of the ecological community, suggesting that no single tree would have value in and of itself, but only derivative value; and in fact, no single tree would have much derivative, or instrumental, value since the removal of any one tree would typically have virtually no impact on the health of the larger ecosystem.[24] On the other hand, the ecological community itself is not sentient, so if we want to claim that it has moral status we would still need to question the sentience-only view—unless, of course, its functioning is morally significant only in virtue of all the sentient creatures, including ourselves, who depend upon it. The point is that a sentience-only view might still work to make trees valuable in and of themselves (and not just to humans), though if we insist that ecosystems have moral status in and of

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[22]Ibid., 72.

[23]Ibid., 72.

[24]In fact, the removal of one, or even several, trees might as likely have a positive effect on an ecosystem, depending on how that is measured—a clear patch in a forest would likely increase, for example, niche variety and species diversity.

themselves, we would be forced, as Warren suggests, to abandon the sentience-only view. We might nonetheless insist that interests are the only, or most important consideration in thinking about the moral status of *individual* organisms.[25]

Warren next objects to the sentience-only view by saying that some have argued, in contrast to Singer, that caring creates greater moral obligations to some beings than to others—to infants more so than to pigs, or to family members more so than to strangers. I agree that we do generally think we owe greater obligations to those with whom we have stronger social ties. However, it is not clear that this involves differences in moral status due to differences in relational qualities. On the sentience-only view, there are reasons for thinking we owe more to family members than to others—relationships matter, but in ways consistent with a sentience-only account of moral considerability for individuals. For example, it might be that we are especially concerned with the welfare of infants and children because harm to them would gravely damage the moral fiber or organization of human society (at least more so than would harm to beings not so closely tied to us). Or, it might be that we favor fellow humans over others because humans have more interests or can feel some things much more deeply than can organisms with less developed mental faculties. Alternatively, sentience might be the basic element establishing moral status, with some obligations and the sorting of them depending upon additional factors, such as promise making or special duties to care for lives which one participated in creating. To object to the universality or the across-the-board equality of Singer's approach is to object

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[25]On Callicott's interpretation of Leopold's work, humans and (most) nonhuman animals could have moral considerability for other reasons than their role in their respective ecosystems. This might include (though he is not explicit on this count) the fact that we have certain morally significant sentimental responses to other sentient beings. But in the case of plants, it appears that their role within ecosystems is their strongest source of moral considerability, though their usefulness to others gives them derivative value.

to his brand of utilitarianism-only, not necessarily to the sentience-only view.

It is worth noting that if an interests-based ethic can account for such commonsense moral intuitions, it might be that other moral principles, such as W. D. Ross's, could be subsumed under Warren's Anti-Cruelty principle. All of Ross's principles, after all, can seen as further specifications of the more general appeal to interests reflected in this principle of Warren's.

A response similar to the one outlined just above can be made to Warren's third objection that Singer's view cannot provide us with a basis for human rights which can trump utility.[26] And indeed, Singer does think that talk of rights is inappropriate in the context of utilitarianism except to the extent that they further happiness. Again however, it would be useful to separate out the sentience-only view from a utilitarian-only view. There is no obvious reason why sentience cannot serve as a foundation for rights unless we are already committed to utilitarianism alone. Regan's account of rights, for example, is similar to Singer's utilitarianism at least insofar as he too depends heavily on the notion of experiential interests.

Finally, Warren argues that Singer's view faces a debilitating dilemma. If the lives and happiness of beings not self-aware (such as invertebrates) matter to them, then equal moral consideration does not allow us to engage in practices necessary for our own well-being. And, she continues, it is implausible to suppose as Singer does that their lives do not matter to them, in which case, "unless human lives and happiness are worth millions of times more than the lives and happiness of small invertebrates, the principle

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[26]Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, 77.

of equal consideration prohibits [even] the cultivation of crops."[27]

This also seems to be an objection to a utilitarian-only view and not obviously to a sentience-only view. Perhaps most humans and some other animals have the capacity to suffer so much so, and in so many ways, that rights are necessary to protect certain key interests in a way not needed for, say, invertebrates. If we had reason to think that pulling a leg off of an insect was *felt* in the same way as doing such to a human, we would be forced to say that removing appendages is *equally bad* whether done to an insect or to a human. We would, of course, need to consider in addition to the immediate physical pain what this would mean to each over time, what it would do to their self-image, relational qualities, and other life prospects. But we do not think it would be felt (etc.) the same and so conclude that although simply having fun is not a sufficient reason for harming an insect, whatever reason is weighty enough to allow harm in such a case would need not be as great as it would in the case of harming a fellow human. The human interests involved are so great that rights could conceivably come into play in a way that would trump the interests of invertebrates (which perhaps only count in utilitarian calculations or when thinking about cruelty, benevolence, etc.), allowing us to do things such as till fields. The sentience-only view can, it appears, be made to fit with commonsense views regarding the enormous difference in obligations to fellow humans and invertebrates.

Although she dismisses the sentience-only view, Warren thinks sentience is a sufficient condition for moral status greater than that conferred by simply being alive. She wonders, however, if a sliding scale of moral status that corresponds to the sliding scale of sentience in organisms could save the sentience-only view by providing a way of

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[27]Ibid., 83.

avoiding the above "comparable interests dilemma" facing Singer. Although she thinks this is an improvement, she argues that because it does not allow us, as a part of a sentience-only view, to attribute more moral status to human infants than to animals with an equal capacity for sentience, we should move to a multi-criterial approach which does not rely solely upon sentience. A second problem is that it does not allow us to ascribe more moral status to organisms which belong to endangered species than to those which do not.[28]

However, it is at least conceivable that a sliding scale of moral status corresponding to the scale of capacity for sentience could be used in an approach which incorporated both rights and calculations of utility in a way that provides special protection to some entities, perhaps even to infants. This aside, however, I would like to add that Warren's comments regarding endangered species raises the question of whether she is linking obligations and the possession of moral status too closely. After all, it would seem odd if our increased obligations to members of endangered species would come from them actually gaining in moral status. It seems more plausible that such organisms' moral status remains the same and our obligations to them increase, especially in those cases where we have directly caused that species' demise. In other words, our actions toward them can potentially create additional obligations. This fits nicely with our commonsense view that increased obligations to other people (especially to our children) often comes from actions such as promise making with no assumed increase in the other's moral status.

Of her complaints against the sentience-only view, I appreciate most her comment

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[28]Ibid., 88.

that it prevents ecosystems and species from being morally considerable since such entities are not sentient due to their lack of interests. Her other complaints, however, point to deficiencies not of those views which emphasize sentience, or interests, but of thorough-going utilitarianism. The conclusion to draw from her discussion here is that we need more complexity at the level of theory at least to the extent that both consequences and rights (or whatever they stand for) are taken seriously with neither trumping the other in every case, and so both individuals and wholes can be morally considerable (though no positive argument for the latter proposal has yet been given).

C. The Agent's Rights Principle

"Moral agents have full and equal basic moral rights, including the rights to life and liberty."[29]

The third criterion Warren seeks to rescue from its usual uni-criterial role to incorporate in her multi-criterial approach is personhood. She first dismisses Regan's "minimalist" definition of personhood—being an experiencing subject of a life—as a implausible candidate for attributions of full moral status. The main problem, according to her, is that it provides rights (for Regan any experiencing subject of a life is also a bearer of rights) to too many things. For example, it makes us obligated to care for the well-being of wild animals and prevents us from protecting ecosystems by eradicating nonnative (but rights-bearing) animals who are destroying native (but non-rights-bearing) plants,[30] as in the mountain goat case spelled out in Chapter One. Nonetheless, she

[29]Ibid., 156.

[30]Ibid., 111-115.

argues, being an experiencing subject of a life is relevant to moral status: mentally sophisticated animals can suffer not only physical pain but also mental anguish, boredom, social isolation, and the like.[31] Therefore, although the subjecthood version of personhood is not sufficient to provide an entity with full moral status, it does mark a difference.

In contrast to Warren, I argued in the previous chapter that subjecthood and its importance in moral deliberation is reducible to considerations of sentience (interests). In fact, Warren's own description of why subjecthood is relevant sounds like a description of how those things with higher mental faculties can suffer—mental anguish, boredom, and social isolation are pains which only certain animals can experience. A sentience-only position could (and *should* in order to be viable) include some notion of being an experiencing subject of a life to take into account these pains.

The same sort of response can be given to Warren's claim that a "maximalist" definition of personhood—that of being a moral agent—should provide normal adult humans with full moral status. She argues that a set of rights corresponding to full moral status is necessary for such beings to live fulfilling lives. We need certain guarantees of freedom, for example, in order to function as rational, autonomous beings.[32] It is not clear, however, that a sentient-only view (though again, not a utilitarian-only view) could not account for this concern. Moral agency is an indicator of what is really relevant to moral status: the ability to suffer certain kinds of harm, such as not being able to, despite one's wishes, act as a rational and autonomous being. As in the previous case, Martin

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[31]Ibid., 120.

[32]Ibid., 156-57.

Benjamin's simple vs. reflective consciousness distinction, interpreted in terms of the sorts of interests one is capable of having, could answer Warren's concerns without positing additional moral considerability due specifically to moral agency.[33]

D. The Human Rights Principle

"Within the limits of their own capacities and of principle 3, human beings who are capable of sentience but not of moral agency have the same moral rights as do moral agents."[34]

As with the previous principle, this one seems also intended as a corrective to a sentience-only view. Warren has already argued that some sentient creatures, namely subjects of a life and moral agents, have greater moral considerability than do others. She worries, though, that without this additional principle, human infants and the mentally disabled might be treated as poorly as are nonhuman animals of roughly equal interests. Warren argues that the interests of human infants should "carry the same moral weight as do those of other human beings," because only by treating them in this way will there later be adults with good lives.[35]

Carl Cohen provides an argument that could bolster Warren's Human Rights principle. Cohen wants to grant rights to human infants but withhold them from nonhuman animals similarly sentient. Humans, he argues, can have rights and animals not because rights make sense only in the human-human world where those involved are

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[33]See previous chapter for discussion of Benjamin's view.

[34]Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, 164.

[35]Ibid., 164.

morally autonomous. To say of rats that they have rights is, he says, "to apply to the world of rats a concept that makes good sense when applied to humans, but which makes no sense at all when applied to rats."[36] Furthermore, individuals qualify for rights not by themselves but by being members of a class of entities who can have rights.[37] Humans are the only ones who are morally autonomous, and being human—even if only an infant who is not morally autonomous—is sufficient for rights.

There are two problems, however, which limit the usefulness of this argument as a justification for Warren's Human Rights principle. First, it is true that rights do not make sense in animal-animal relationships since animals do not have duties against one another. Only moral agents can have duties, and only moral agents can be held accountable for violating another's rights. But we are not wondering whether rights are present in the world of rats. We are wondering if rights are present, or relevant, in the cross-species world of humans and rats. That is, do we moral agents have obligations to rats that are expressible in terms of rights in the same way that we as moral agents have obligations to human infants that are expressible in terms of rights? To say that rats are not part of our moral community but human infants are is to make an assertion, not an argument. In addition, the class of humans—the biological class of *Homo sapiens*—is irrelevant to the question at hand. The relevant class is that consisting of beings who have interests serious enough to warrant special protection (assuming, that is, there are such things as rights). Singer, although not fond of rights talk himself, pointed out the

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[36]Carl Cohen, "Do Animals Have Rights?" *Analyzing Moral Issues*, ed. Judith A. Boss (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 829.

[37]Carl Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research," *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven C. Cahn and Peter Markie (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1998), 831. And: Carl Cohen, "Do Animals Have Rights?" 828.

arbitrary nature of favoring one's own species over another when it comes to questions of moral obligation.

In addition to Warren's claim that granting rights to children helps ensure happy adults, there are better ways to bolster the Human Rights principle. It is worth noting, though, that each of these ways of protecting human infants to the desired degree works without claiming that they differ in moral considerability from nonhuman animals of roughly the same degree of sentience. First, we could distinguish human infants from such nonhuman animals by invoking the claim that the former are at least potential persons who *will* have a richer set of interests in need of protection. However, this seems less than a perfect solution. It faces the same problem as do arguments from potentiality aimed at the protection of fetuses: how do we prevent such an argument from conferring rights, etc., to gametes? The response that unification of gametes to form a zygote provides the desired line of separation between non-potential persons and potential persons seems ad hoc or arbitrary. Furthermore, even if the potentiality argument succeeded in protecting normally healthy infants, it is not clear that it would protect the permanently mentally disabled. A second way in which the sentience-only view could provide significant protection for infants and the mentally handicapped is by taking into account both the harm done to them as sentient beings and the harm done to those who love and care for them. This might also provide additional protections for animals we have as pets. Third, and very similar to Warren's happy adults argument, it might be that human societies can flourish only when we value human life so thoroughly that we must overlook any differences between infants and adults. And fourth, even if infants and some nonhuman animals, such as cats and dogs, should be treated roughly equally due to

similarities of interests, this does not mean that we should, for example, conduct medical experiments on infants. It could as easily mean, as Singer suggests, that cats and dogs should not be treated in ways in which we are unwilling to treat infants.

It seems then, that the best arguments in support of Warren's Human Rights principle has to do with protecting interests—those of full persons (and of society in general) and the future interests of infants themselves. In fact, it does not seem that Warren intends her own argument to reflect greater moral worth for human infants than for nonhuman animals with roughly the same interests, given that her primary argument for this principle rests on the desire to see well-adjusted happy adult human beings.

These comments regarding Warren's Agent's Rights and Human Rights principles suggest revisions of the Anti-Cruelty principle (no harm to sentient creatures unless strong justification) such that the Agent's and Human Rights principles would be subsumed under it as simply more specific articulations of the principle. As previously suggested, we can follow this pattern further by including under the Anti-Cruelty principle some additional set of principles which governs human-human (and perhaps human-other sentient animal) interactions, such as those of Ross or Beauchamp and Childress.

E. The Ecological Principle *and* F. The Interspecific Principle

"Living things that are not moral agents, but that are important to the ecosystems of which they are part, have, within the limits of principles 1-4, a stronger moral status than could be based upon their intrinsic properties alone; ecologically important entities that are not themselves alive, such as species and habitats, may also legitimately be accorded

a stronger moral status than their intrinsic properties would indicate." [38] (The Ecological Principle)

"Within the limits of principles 1-5, non-human members of mixed social communities have a stronger moral status than could be based upon their intrinsic properties alone." [39] (The Interspecific Principle)

Each of the previous principles (A-D) expresses obligations to individuals due to properties they themselves possess. J. Baird Callicott and Nel Noddings each offer versions of an alternative: moral considerability and the obligations it helps to establish are to be understood in terms of relational properties. Warren thinks this is an important addition to the notion of moral considerability because it accounts for the commonsense view that although wholes do not themselves have interests, they can nonetheless be morally considerable. But, she argues, this does not replace the criteria of sentience, moral agency, and the like.

Callicott argues for moral considerability of both individuals and wholes. On his view, the moral standing of individuals is tied to their membership in various communities which are themselves morally considerable. These communities are nested within one another, forming concentric circles of relationships with families at the center, followed by less and less close relationships as we move to rings further from the center. We are each members of many of these communities. Obligations arise within these communities such that we owe more weighty duties to members of communities closest to the center, for any one of us, than to those less close. As we add communities of less

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[38]Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, 166.

[39]Ibid., 168.

intimate relationships, obligations are added, but the new obligations do not replace prior, or more central, ones. They do, however, limit how we can fulfill the more inner duties to our partners and children. For example, the choice of food for ourselves and our families would be limited by what can be produced with minimal adverse impact on the biotic community. Duties owed to individuals are, then, determined by their membership in relationships ranging from family to ecosystems.[40]

Callicott supports his concentric circles model by appealing to a Humean account of ethics in which obligations arise from sentiment, with reason playing a supporting informative role. We are naturally inclined to think well of friendship, generosity, and other social virtues in the sense that the good of others and of the community matter to us. Reason can then help us to develop principles of justice, legal institutions and rights, etc., to better serve the communities of which we are a part.[41] Families are the most central community because it is with respect to them that we have the strongest sense of connection and dependence. This should not, Callicott suggests, seem strange since from an evolutionary perspective, close connections to family were necessary for success. He points to Darwin as supplying an evolutionary explanation for why we have the moral sentiments we do. In brief, Darwin argues that family units—and later, larger social groups—were more successful than others if their members instinctually cooperated with one another. Altruism was thus naturally and socially selected for. Eventually, the things

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[40]J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," *The Animal Rights/Environmental Ethics Debate: The Environmental Perspective*, ed. Eugene C. Hargrove (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1992), 249-61; J. Baird Callicott, "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic," *Companion to A Sand County Almanac: Interpretive and Critical Essays*, ed. J. Baird Callicott (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1987), 186-217.

[41]Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, 124.

which furthered the community's well-being were called good, while those that created problems were considered evil.[42] Morality was built upon these community sentiments with reason leading us to continually expand our moral communities to what they presently are.

When we recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all elements (including ourselves) of ecosystems, we should be led, as Callicott's intellectual predecessor Aldo Leopold suggested, to expand our moral sentiments and sense of community accordingly. Our obligations would then increase to cover not only members of the biotic community, but of the biotic community itself. Becoming aware that the environment and all its parts form a community in which we are mere members should lead to community-oriented moral sentiments. These new moral concerns would not replace earlier established ones, but they would complicate our moral world, as was the case when people expanded their notions of social community from kinship relations to all humans. Leopold's prescription (known as the "land ethic") to act to further "the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community," demonstrates the holistic element this approach ends up with.[43] But as Warren qualifies, "This does not mean that the land ethic ascribes moral status only to species, ecosystems, or the biosphere as a whole. It means, rather, that our moral obligations to individual organisms and groups of organisms are not based upon their intrinsic properties . . . [but on] the good of the

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[42]Ibid., 125.

[43]Ibid., 126. Leopold's original articulation of the land ethic can be found in: Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford U P, 1987), 224-25.

community as a whole."[44] Described like this, however, individuals do not have moral considerability in themselves, but are morally relevant only to the extent that they play a role in the well-being of the community.

As Warren points out, Callicott does not want such a thorough-going holism. Pushed by complaints that his theory could lead to horrific consequences for individual humans for the good of the community, Callicott altered his view to take more seriously the moral considerability of individual entities. He argues that as our moral thinking has expanded to include communities beyond families, obligations are added without dismantling the original obligations. As already mentioned, new obligations may, however, limit the legitimate avenues of fulfillment of more prior ones.[45] So, as Warren puts it, "the structure of each community to which we belong determines the moral obligations that we have to co-members of the community; while the 'nesting' of communities . . . provides the means of assigning relative weights to obligations arising from different communities."[46]

Warren likes Callicott's work because it accounts for the commonsense view that we owe obligations to those with whom we are in closest relationships over those with whom we are less connected. In addition, it explains how we can have obligations toward different sorts of entities and, in particular, towards infants and others lacking reflective consciousness—they are part of our most central relationships. Furthermore, she points

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[44]Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, 126. There is some uncertainty as to Callicott's position regarding the role of reason and the relation between intrinsic properties and moral considerability. This will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

[45]Ibid., 127 and 128.

[46]Ibid., 128.

out that by allowing for human-human relationships and the associated obligations to be ranked higher than those of other relationships, Callicott's view is more practically acceptable than are the strict egalitarian views of Singer and Regan.[47]

Warren does not, however, take it as providing the entire story, and argues that Callicott's work should result in just one principle among several, with the remainder being developed from different criteria of moral considerability. She points out that although some obligations depend upon closeness, not all do—murder is just as wrong when committed against a stranger as against a family member.[48] Second, we should worry about the structure of the community itself being unjust, which raises doubts regarding Callicott's claim that moral evaluations are to be done in terms of harm and benefit to specific communities.[49] Third, it is not clear how to justify, on Callicott's view, obligations to sentient individuals not part of already existing communities. Finally, she complains that, despite the theoretical unity and coherence touted by Callicott, his theory fails to provide ways to resolve conflicts between different prima facie moral obligations, whether arising from within a single community or different ones.[50] These problems can be made to largely disappear, Warren thinks, if we maintain the previously described principles emphasizing the welfare of individuals.[51]

Nel Noddings' approach is quite different from Callicott's in that she does not

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[47]Ibid., 132.

[48]Ibid., 134.

[49]Ibid., 134.

[50]Ibid., 132-33.

[51]Ibid., 133.

suppose that already existing communities establish the moral considerability of individual entities and our corresponding obligations to them. She does, however, think that some relationships are closer, or more centrally important to each person than are others, and that obligations are greater as the relationships are closer. Also like Callicott, she thinks that feelings—in her case, of caring—establish the obligations we have. In her account, the "one-caring" is spontaneously moved to help the "cared-for" upon feeling that person's needs. This is not to say that reason plays no role, but that emotions provide the motivation (making her as indebted to Hume as is Callicott). Furthermore, caring relationships must eventually be, at least in some way, reciprocal. Humans are by nature caring beings, and when we first meet others we do so with a caring attitude. These relationships develop in varying degrees of reciprocating emotional connection, and the obligations owed are in proportion to the degree of this connection.[52]

Warren raises several concerns about Noddings' approach, though concludes that caring relationships are one way in which obligations can arise. It cannot be the only way, though. First, it wrongly assumes that all people have the capacity to care about others. Such a capacity does not seem universally innate. Furthermore, it seems that even those capable of responding empathetically to others do not always have such impulses. Yet we would not want to excuse someone from doing what would otherwise be considered obligatory simply because she lacked the ability to care for a particular person or animal.[53]

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[52]Ibid., 137-40. I am drawing directly from Warren's description of Noddings' work here. The original is: Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: U California P, 1984).

[53]Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, 142-46.

Noddings' approach provides less protection for nonhuman animals than either commonsense or the sentience-based arguments of Singer and Regan would allow. She holds that we all are capable of feeling a "sympathetic twinge" when we see an animal suffer, so we do have obligations to not cause them needless harm.[54] But for Noddings, obligations arise in relationships just in case there is someone caring and that caring is eventually positively responded to. But lack of caring should not allow for a weakening of obligations (an important worry given the often appalling lack of compassion and fellow feeling exhibited by people). Furthermore, many animals are incapable of any positive response to acts of care. That they bite or run away should not be a reason to use them in any way we want. And importantly, Noddings' inability to deal adequately with animals presumably goes doubly for the rest of nature.

Caring establishes obligations, but need not establish moral considerability. We can care about inanimate objects or places which we do not think have standing. The reciprocity requirement could be used here to draw the line of morally considerable beings tightly enough to leave these inanimate things aside, but it ends up drawing it too tightly because it also leaves out many sentient nonhuman animals. An alternative would be to say that the *potential* for reciprocating caring relationships is enough to establish standing. But it would be odd to have a theory of obligation based on relationships of complex emotional interaction which allows (or requires) obligations even when all this is not actually present. In the end, it seems we can retain an important role for relationships of care within ethics without reducing all of ethics to this. Warren cites Rita Manning as an example of someone who bolsters care ethics with some rules and

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[54]Ibid., 141.

principles.[55]

G. The Transitivity of Respect Principle

"Within the limits of principles 1-6, and to the extent that is feasible and morally permissible, moral agents should respect one another's attributions of moral status."[56]

Of all Warren's principles, I find this one the most intriguing. It creates room for views of moral considerability and obligation growing out of diverse worldviews. Various objects not covered by the other principles might be, for religious or related reasons, objects of moral concern. Rock formations sacred to native peoples in Australia (Ulura) and the American Southwest (Shiprock) are the sorts of thing that might be protected by this principle.[57] Even if these are not themselves morally considerable due to the absence of key intrinsic or relational properties, we have obligations to protect them. Such obligations are owed to the people who value the objects in question. Warren makes it clear that this principle does not require us to accept others' ascriptions of moral considerability, but it does require that we treat these views with respect. We should not be overly confident that our ascriptions of moral considerability are the only correct ones. We should at least listen and consider the plausibility of these alternative views, as long as acting on them would not violate obvious and significant interests as outlined in the other principles.

This principle is quite welcome. We should not be so confident that our

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[55]Ibid., 145-46.

[56]Ibid., 170.

[57]Ibid., 171.

worldview is the one correct view that we are unwilling to take other beliefs seriously. There are limits to plausibility, of course, and to what should be required of us, but I will leave these issues for another time. In any case, the things other people see as morally considerable are valuable at least derivatively in that they presumably further those people's interests. We should respect these beliefs and protect the relevant objects. Because this principle relies on respect for other people's interests, I would like to suggest that it is best seen as yet another further specification of Warren's Anti-Cruelty, or better named the "Protection of Interests" principle.

Conclusion

Warren's principle-based approach to ethics has many advantages. Principles serve as articulations of, and in turn provide guidance for, evaluating commonsense moral beliefs and evaluations of particular cases. In this way, they both help to organize our thinking and provide reminders or guides pointing out the morally relevant factors of difficult cases. They provide some continuity in our moral thinking about particular cases, but can be altered when conflicting intuitions and judgments begin to stack up against them. Thus described, the connection between principles and other elements of moral thinking is one of reflective equilibrium. Principles can also provide, from Ross's and Warren's point of view, the above services without appeal to the problematic higher level of theories. This is especially important in light of the unresolved conflict between the major competing theories such as utilitarianism and Kantianism. Principles can provide a useful way to cover the sorts of intuition which otherwise seem most at home in only one or another of the mutually inconsistent competing theories.

I have argued, however, that some of Warren's principles should be revised. It is not clear, for example, whether being alive confers value, but even if it does it ought to take a back seat to principles based on the interests of those things which are both alive and sentient. The lack of a persuasive argument in favor of a life-ethic should caution us against placing too much emphasis on the principle it supports. Other considerations, such as the commonsense belief that all living things have prima facie value, that life might be exceedingly rare in the universe (especially, perhaps, the particular mix found here on Earth), and that protecting all life might (for psychological reasons) serve to protect interest-bearing entities, argue for keeping this principle, but with a low rank with respect to the others.

This last way of supporting the Protection of Life principles is a reason to think of this principle as best subsumed under the Protection of Interests (Warren's Anti-Cruelty) principle. The Agent's Rights and Human Rights principles could be similarly subsumed under the Protection of Interests principle. The arguments supporting the Agent's Rights principle (e.g., moral agents can be harmed in more ways than can other entities) seem clearly to be reducible to interests. The Human Rights principle seems even more directly to arise out of the interests of sentient creatures, both those of the infants themselves and of those who care about them. Even the Transitivity of Respect principle is an example of a principle articulating more precisely particular ways of interacting with other interest-bearing beings. This is not to jettison these principles, but to recognize that their most plausible justification comes from the interests of sentient beings.

It seems possible that there are many other more specific articulations of obligations arising from interests in addition to these just mentioned. It is not clear

exactly how to best arrange these principles, but the Protection of Interests principle might best be expanded to include, for example, all of Ross's principles, no longer limited expressly to humans (all of his principles take interests seriously). The Protection of Interests principle could be worded in such a way that makes it generally about protecting and furthering interests with the more specific principles subsumed beneath it. The relation-based principle supported by Callicott and Noddings is the one not so easily subsumed under an interests protecting principle. It represents a quite different approach to ethics in that it is not only not reducible to interests, but it is also not directly applicable to individuals. There are, then at least two types of principles, drawing from two very different sources: individualistic principles tied predominantly to interests and holistic principles drawing from the notion of community.

Warren had argued for a principlist approach at least in part because she recognized that relying on theory to account for the diversity of sources of moral considerability, and the resulting obligations, would mean relying on a diverse set of moral theories which would in turn, "[doom us] to live with many moral disagreements of the most basic sort, with no hope that the global human community can ever agree about even the most fundamental moral principles."[58] She thinks that we can avoid these problems if we focus on the sources of moral considerability and the principles they support. This reasoning follows that described earlier of both Ross and Beauchamp and Childress in their choosing to abandon theory in favor of principles. Beauchamp and Childress, in particular, argue that a virtue of principlism is that principles represent the

[58]Ibid., 20. This does not necessarily mean that she is a monist about ethical theory, however; she wishes, I take it, to avoid discussions of ethical theory all together.

shared ground between otherwise inconsistent theories, worldviews, and the like.

There are, however, reasons to want to work also at the level of theory. First, difference at the theory level need not, as Warren seems to worry, entail relativism. Several factors limit the extent to which various beliefs and positions can be legitimate, such as common experiences of living human lives and possessing certain universal needs. Theories which allowed for genocide, for example, would not be legitimate. Neither would theories built on only egoism, or that denied free will or responsibility. Second, it is not clear how we are to adjudicate conflict between inconsistent principles such as between those attentive to interests and those concerned first with community. Ross's answer (though he was not thinking about the individualism-holism problem) was that we can know intuitively, once we had experiences enough to develop our moral judgment, which principles were to be applied to a particular situation. Warren has proposed a ranking which is, presumably, to minimize this problem. However, I have argued above that, with the exception of the group-based principles and the possible exception of the life-based principle, her principles are best seen as further specifications of a Protection of Interests principle. This has the effect of eliminating Warren's particular grounds for ranking. Work at the level of theory has the potential to provide some guidance (perhaps even some reasons for a renewed ranking of principles) here.

In the remaining chapters, I will argue in favor of a version of Callicott's community model of environmental ethics, incorporating Warren's insights regarding principles, as a response to the individualism–holism problem. Coupling Warren's and Callicott's work has two advantages. First, Warren's principles provide a needed substantive element to Callicott's otherwise quite abstract theory. Second, Callicott's

work provides theoretical support for Warren's principles. When we revise her principles as specified, she (or we) end up with two very different sorts: one individualistic, the other holistic. The former works on Singer-like reasoning that because many nonhuman entities are like us in morally relevant ways (i.e., they have interests), they are like us in being morally considerable. The latter works on a Humean model in which moral belief and values come from our sentimental responses (as moral agents) to various entities or actions. Is there a way to bring these together to make her work more theoretically coherent? Callicott thinks that he can cover both individualistic and holistic concerns under the same theory (or meta-theory since Humean ethics is a description of what ethics is and how it arises). Because Warren already relies on Callicott's Humean approach to develop the holist element of her principles, her work might gain overall theoretical (or meta-theoretical) coherence through a redescription of all her principles in Humean terms. In the end, then, we must return to the theory question, then, but we do so with a much clearer sense of what sorts of principles any overall theory might incorporate if it were to take seriously the moral considerability of both individuals and wholes.

CHAPTER 4

THE VALUE OF NATURE

Introduction

The previous two chapters focused primarily on how we should think about the moral standing of individual entities. Obligations owed to individuals are determined at least in part by their possessing interests. Peter Singer takes this as a starting point to argue persuasively that we should expand our moral community to include many non-human animals. If possessing interests (he favors talking of sentience) is sufficient for taking fellow humans as counting morally, then it should be sufficient for taking all the nonhuman animals who share this characteristic as counting morally. Possessing interests cannot, however, confer moral considerability to non-sentient individuals such as plants or for wholes such as species and ecosystems.

Mary Anne Warren attempts to account for both individuals and wholes. She argues that several different sources of moral considerability (interests being one of them) can generate a small number of ethical principles for guiding action. I argued for a revision of some of these, leaving two primary (though incommensurable) principles covering the case of individual entities and wholes, respectively, with her other principles subsumed under these. This leaves intact her general goal of using a principle-based approach to solve the individualism–holism problem. But, although she uses J. Baird Callicott's Humean approach to ethics to support the claim that wholes can be morally considerable, she does not extend this thinking to the case of individuals. But a Humean ethics is providing a description of what ethics is and how it comes about and evolves.

Applying such an explanation to only one part of her set of principles leaves in question whether it can be applied to the rest. If not, Warren's system of principles is in danger of being incoherent. I believe, however, that the Humean account has the potential to cover both the individualistic and holistic sources of value and resulting principles, and that Callicott's work suggests a way of doing this.

Callicott thinks that the Humean account of ethics (in conjunction with Aldo Leopold's expanding set of concentric circles of moral considerability) can explain how it is that *both* individual entities and ecosystems can have moral standing. Being in communities with others establishes obligations through Humean sentimental reactions. Ethics with respect to other humans grew out of such reactions, and as we come to see ecosystems in terms of community, ethics will be, or should be, expanded accordingly. Callicott says very little, however, about the substantive parts of such an environmental ethic. That is, he provides an ethical framework, but with regard to specific principles or moral beliefs he says only that as our moral community is expanded to include additional sorts of entities, the substantive elements corresponding to original parts of the community are added to, not replaced. He does not specify what these are, though presumably prohibitions against killing innocent people, lying, and stealing remain in place even as we come to recognize obligations to fellow ecosystem members and to ecosystems themselves.

Combining Warren's principles (revised according to the previous chapter's conclusions) with Callicott's Humean–Leopoldian framework can help avoid the substantive ethics issue for Callicott, while providing Warren with greater theoretical coherence. This union is attractive also because both aim to bridge the

individualism–holism divide, and secondarily, because Warren already relies on Callicott's Humean approach to account for the moral considerability of wholes. Lastly, they are both trying to avoid appealing to pluralism (and the always lurking concern of relativism) to solve the individualism–holism problem, though I will argue in these last chapters that they are mistaken in their rejection of pluralism.

Before arguing for a pluralistic interpretation of a Callicott–Warren synthesis, however, several issues must be worked out. First, what are the most common and influential answers (in the North American setting, in any case) to the question of how we should think morally about the environment? Are ecosystems and their component parts seen to be valuable in and of themselves (i.e., intrinsically valuable), or valuable simply due to their usefulness to interested others such as ourselves (i.e., instrumentally valuable)? If the former, we would have a great deal to rethink regarding how we should act towards other things in the world. Our decisions would have to take much more into account than simply our own human (and perhaps some nonhuman animal) interests and values. If the latter, we could simply count the environment as yet another of the things to be managed to maximize benefits for us. Gifford Pinchot and John Muir provide examples of these contrasting views. Pinchot represents a thoroughly instrumentalist and consumptive (and anthropocentric) approach to nature, while Muir introduces both non-consumptive instrumental uses and intrinsic value to the mix. A discussion of their views will lay the groundwork for looking more closely at Callicott's work.

Contemporary environmentalists worry that, on the one hand, instrumentalist arguments provide too weak a foundation for environmental protection, but on the other hand, intrinsic arguments are too difficult to defend—nature has no interests of its own

and most, if not all, of the ways we describe it as being valuable seems to be reducible to our own interests. Callicott, for instance, maintains that even arguments based on aesthetic value can be "readily reducible to a homocentric or utilitarian form: other species, in the final analysis, are valuable as aesthetic resources for the aesthetic enjoyment they afford (some) people."[1] In order to alleviate at least some of the concern, I will argue that by playing a significant role in our self-conceptions or understandings, nature gains value (and something more like moral considerability) in a way not easily captured by our usual notion of the instrumental/intrinsic value dichotomy, and in a way that strengthens the foundations of environmental protection. This move will be consistent with, and be best defended in terms of a Humean approach to ethics of the sort defended by Callicott. In fact, it will provide a solution to one of Callicott's problems—that of making the environment matter enough in our moral thinking once the holistic element of his work is downplayed to avoid Tom Regan's complaint that it would otherwise lead to serious harm to individual humans.

An additional worry arises, however: by relying on a Humean approach to ethics, emphasizing sentimental reactions over reason, Callicott's theory (and my friendly amendment) appears open to charges of relativism. I spend some time in this chapter

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[1]J. Baird Callicott, "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species," *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1989), 131. In an endnote, Callicott acknowledges alternative views on this matter. He quotes Mark Sagoff, for example, as saying, "we enjoy an object because it is valuable; we do not value it merely because we enjoy it. . . Esthetic experience is a perception as it were, of a certain kind of worth" (Quoted originally from: Mark Sagoff, "on the Preservation of Species," *Columbia Journal of Law* 7 (1980): 64) (Callicott, "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species, 290, ftnt 15.). I lean towards Callicott's interpretation of aesthetic value as being reducible to interests, but it is not my intent to resolve the issue here. Rather, my claim is that even if positions such as Sagoff's are plausible, it is not clear how to defend them against the reductionist claim. If not, we are back to my original point, which was simply that environmentalists worry about the difficulty of defending arguments for intrinsic value for nature.

arguing that this need not be the case, though unlike Callicott, my solution to the relativism problem does not rely on what I take to be a false notion of universal agreement. Ethical pluralism, which denies that all good and important values are held universally, becomes an attractive way to think about ethics, and one that can be made consistent with a Humean approach, avoid relativism, and perhaps make room for the seemingly inconsistent claims that both individuals and wholes can be morally considerable. This will be the topic of these final two chapters. The current chapter will focus on the two issues of instrumental (consumptive and non-consumptive) and intrinsic value for wholes, and the plausibility of a non-relativistic Humean environmental ethics.

Pinchot's Conservationist and Muir's Preservationist Approaches

Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), the first head of the U. S. Forest Service, represents a popular instrumentalist approach to thinking about the environment in the American tradition. His view has been called *scientific management, wise use* (though this has been reappropriated by the political right to mean whatever will most benefit private industry), or *conservationism*. In his autobiography, Pinchot states that although he hates cutting down trees, the aim of conservation is "not to stop the ax, but to regulate its use." Forestry under his conservationist interpretation means "handling trees so that one crop follows another."[2] In short, Pinchot sees nature as natural resources to be carefully managed. He was also concerned that the county's natural resources not be devoured by corporations and a small number of private citizens to the long term detriment of the

[2]Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, (Washington, D.C.: Island P, 1998), 28-31.

larger population. Natural resources belong to all citizens and so should be managed accordingly.

Pinchot's approach is utilitarian in two ways. First, he was concerned to distribute the benefits of America's natural resources to the greatest number. This would not be possible, he thought, unless the federal government carefully controlled extraction. Second, he was concerned to maximize the benefits derived from resource use over time. Quoting approvingly from Theodore Roosevelt, Pinchot writes, "Forest protection is not an end in itself; it is a means to increase and sustain the resources of our country and the industries which depend upon them. . . . We have come to see clearly that whatever destroys the forest, except to make way for agriculture, threatens our well-being."[3] Scientific management is the best tool we have to prevent such destruction and loss of potential benefit. Clear cutting without replanting or done on steep hillsides would ruin any hope of long term benefit. But, he argued in 1896, the forest preserve system (the forerunner of the U. S. Forest Service) was for "practical forestry," not for locking up resources.[4] It should therefore not be thought that Pinchot intended that resources be set aside from use.

Pinchot's view was, from an environmentalist perspective, an improvement over the reigning view that the government should divest itself of all its publicly held lands to leave resource extraction solely to private enterprise. He had seen everywhere the devastating effects on North America's forests of failing to regulate resource use and had in mind the alternative of sustainable development through careful scientific management

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[3]Ibid., 190.

[4]Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale U P, 1982), 136.

by public institutions. If private monopolies of resources could be avoided, rich land owners (often corporations) would no longer be the sole beneficiaries of the nation's natural resources, and extraction could be more carefully managed to extend its benefits over time. These goals have never been fully realized, of course. But that in itself is not a reason to dismiss Pinchot's vision—the U. S. Forest Service (and other resource management agencies) simply has not consistently sought to benefit the general population over the interests of private industry, nor sufficiently emphasized sustainable development. Finally, although Pinchot himself was presumably not worrying about this issue, his conceiving of nature as a material resource for human use avoids the philosophical complications of positing intrinsic value (and hence moral considerability) for nature itself. In his mind, "There are just two things on this material earth—people and natural resources. . . . [And] a constant and sufficient supply of natural resources is the basic human problem."[5] Because only the interests of people matter, environmental issues do not especially complicate our moral thinking.

In contrast to Pinchot's conservationist approach of protecting nature *for* human use, John Muir argued for the preservation of nature, protecting it *from* human use. Or more accurately, Muir objected to using nature simply as a material good for human consumption; non-consumptive uses, such as aesthetic appreciation and recreation, were preferred and encouraged. But in addition, Muir saw animals and plants as important in and of themselves; humans are merely part of the world, not the reason for its existence. Even rattlesnakes and coyotes, though they periodically "steal" from humans, "are all,

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[5]Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 325.

head and tail, good for themselves, and we need not begrudge them their share of life."[6] Finally, everything is, Muir believed, God's continuing creation (a sort of divinely inspired evolution), and all of it interconnected (a view foreshadowing the interconnectedness insight of ecology). We come to such conclusions through experience. We know that all living beings are our "fellow mortals" through living with them.[7] We know that everything is interconnected and is God's creation (and that God is present in the world) through mystical experience in nature, in which "you lose consciousness of your own separate existence; you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature."[8] In his journal he described an experience of this sort in the Sierra Nevada: "I sprang to my feet crying: 'Heavens and earth! Rock is not light, not heavy, not transparent, not opaque, but every pore gushes, glows like a thought with immortal life!'" Just as suddenly, "Lake Nevada [came] back to earth with its own natural beauty, shored and mountained in terrestrial grandeur . . ."[9]

These views—that animals and humans are *fellow* mortals, that all life is

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[6]John Muir, *Our National Parks* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), 43.

[7]John Muir, *Stickeen* (Berkeley: Heyday, 1990), 70.

[8]John Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), 120.

[9]John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1979), 84. Annie Dillard, a bit more recently, describes a similar experience of oneness with the world, in which she says, "The ridge's bosses and hummocks sprout bulging from its side; the whole mountain looms miles closer; the light warms and reddens; the bare forest folds and pleats itself like living protoplasm before my eyes, like a running chart, a wildly scrawling oscillograph on the present moment. The air cools; the puppy's skin is hot. I am more alive than all the world." And, just as in Muir's case, as soon as she becomes aware of the experience, she loses it: "And the second I verbalize this awareness in my brain, I cease to see the mountain or feel the puppy. I am opaque, so much black asphalt. But at the same second, the second I know I've lost it, I also realize that the puppy is still squirming on his back under my hand." These sorts of experiences are not altogether uncommon, as conversations with so-called nature lovers well attest. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (N.p.: Perennial Classics, Harper Collins, 1999), 79-80.

interconnected, and that everything is (a transcendent and immanent) God's continuing creation—has important implications for Muir's thinking about the environment. Most importantly, the interconnection of all of nature makes the human practice of separating ourselves into cities costly. A great deal of the unhappiness and anxiety in the world could be alleviated by people spending more time in wild nature. Such experiences provide needed spiritual and psychological renewal. Thoreau had earlier thought similarly, arguing that experiences in wild nature could have a jarring affect, shaking people out of their narrow conformist lives. Following Thoreau's lead, Muir argued that people need to go to the mountains to awaken "from the stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry and the deadly apathy of luxury, . . . to mix and enrich their own little ongoings with those of Nature, and to get rid of rust and disease."[10] We must protect nature because of these important benefits to ourselves *and* because everything is God's creation and is saturated with divine spirit. The universe, Muir says, "would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge." Nature does not make everything for the sole purpose of making humans happy.[11]

Although Pinchot's view was a significant improvement over the *laissez-faire* privatization approach to resource use supported by the majority of his contemporaries, from an environmentalist standpoint Muir's position represents a further advance by offering a stronger justification for protecting nature to a more serious degree. The conservationist approach, even if its resource extraction mentality is tempered with

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[10]Muir, *Our National Parks*, 1.

[11]Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 78 and 79.

protecting hunting lands from development (e.g., wetlands for duck habitat), is likely to protect only that which is useful to fulfilling human material needs; nature is, after all, merely a resource conceptualized in terms of extraction potential, or consumption. When we add Muir's insights, we add both spiritual and psychological benefits to the list of nature's advantages, and the argument that nature should be protected as God's creation, or indirectly as the habitat for God's snakes and coyotes. Muir, then, gives us both a non-consumptive instrumentalist and an intrinsic value argument for the protection of nature.

One problem with using Muir's argument for intrinsic value of nature is that it depends on certain religious views that not everyone accepts. So even if he is right, it seems unlikely that it could convince non-theists that nature should be protected. The argument from design, for example, which Muir appeals to in pointing to the beauty and function of bird feathers to argue that all of nature is God's creation, will convince only those who already believe in the divine. Arguing from mystical experience faces a similar problem—it convinces only those who have had similar experiences and who interpret these in religious terms. In fact, at least in the United States, both mainstream and (to an even greater degree) fundamentalist religious traditions are leery of talk of mystical experience.[12] Stewardship of God's creation, where humans are nature's superiors and caretakers, is widely accepted by these traditions, but this is rooted in a particular reading of the Genesis creation account, not in mystical experience. It appears, then, that Muir's arguments for intrinsic value of nature lack, not necessarily plausibility, but certainly convincing force.

We could, however, think of Muir's position in terms of psychological betterment,

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[12]A notable exception is Jewish mysticism, referencing, for example, the Kabbalah.

which could more easily avoid this objection. The argument would then not necessarily rely on nature mysticism, but on the rather common experience of feeling renewed, refreshed, or invigorated by time spent in nature. Contrary to the objectives of most environmentalists, though, this gets only instrumental value for nature since value in this case comes from providing us with benefits, albeit *non-extraction* benefits. Because protection then depends upon often fluctuating human interests, it appears to provide a less than secure way of insuring a high level of protection for nonhuman nature; it is too contingent on the depth of our care. This is why environmentalists often argue that nature should be protected independent of its value to us. An instrumentalist, on the other hand, could point out that there are a number of instrumental reasons which, especially when taken jointly, go quite a way toward establishing serious obligations to nature. In addition to Muir's particular non-consumptive uses, nature is a significant source of the American temperament or identity (Frederick Jackson Turner), of personal character (Sigurd Olson), and of artistic inspiration (Ansel Adams and Georgia O'Keeffe). Nature is also instrumentally valuable by being a source of potential medicinal products, genetic diversity (which would help stave off ecological collapse in the face of rapid environmental change), and recreational opportunities.[13] Some of these may not by themselves justify much protection of the environment when weighed against more immediate consumptive material interests, but together they demand a significant degree

[13]See Michael P. Nelson's "An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments" for a quite thorough list of arguments for wilderness protection, most of which are instrumentalist arguments, in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, eds. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1998), 154-98.

of protection. They become even more weighty once we also take animal interests seriously.

Aldo Leopold complained about the conservationist, or consumptive–instrumentalist view from an ecological perspective by pointing out that:

> One basic weakness in a conservation system based wholly on economic motives is that most members of the land community have no economic value. Wildflowers and songbirds are examples. Of the 22,000 higher plants and animals native to Wisconsin, it is doubtful whether more than 5 per cent [sic.] can be sold, fed, eaten, or otherwise put to economic use. Yet these creatures are members of the biotic community, and if (as I believe) its stability depends on its integrity, they are entitled to continuance.[14]

When we add non-consumptive uses, presumably the number of valuable entities increases. Yet it is still conceivable that many things could be damaged or removed from the environment with no significant loss of either stability or non-consumptive benefits—or at any rate, no loss of benefits so great that they could not be made up for through other (perhaps consumptive) benefits. Furthermore, as already alluded to, most environmentalists think that nature should be protected even if it does not benefit us. On their view, Leopold's tally of valuable beings ought to number one hundred percent.

That the instrumentalist argument for the protection of nature does not conform with the intuitions of many environmentally minded people, who think that nature has

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[14]Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1987), 210.

value independent of its, even non-extraction, usefulness to us, can be seen in Donald Regan's redescription of Richard Sylvan's "last person" argument:

> Suppose Jones is the last person on earth. She knows there will be no one after her. As she dies, she can push a button which detonates a cataclysmic explosion and destroys the Grand Canyon. Would it be wrong for her to push the button? Many people are inclined to think it would be wrong; and they also think that the wrongness of pushing the button can only be accounted for by granting the Canyon value in itself.[15]

Sylvan had taken this to demonstrate that nature has intrinsic value. By itself, however, the thought experiment does not decide the issue. Thought experiments are convincing only to the extent to which they appeal to shared reactions. But in this case, it is not clear that everyone would think as Sylvan supposed. It seems just as likely that the thought experiment shows that, despite our unreflective initial reaction that Jones was wrong to destroy the canyon, she was not since no valuer would have remained. Nevertheless, the intuition that nature has intrinsic value is strong for many people. As already mentioned, relying on instrumentalist arguments alone means that protection of nature is dependent on whether or not, and to what extent, we have interests which are furthered by protecting it. Things not so useful can be destroyed with no additional justification, or can be traded off for other human wants or needs. A great deal of the environment can, it seems, be altered or even destroyed without threatening human well-being. But to avoid this result,

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[15]Donald Regan, "Duties of Preservation." *The Preservation of Species: The Value of Biological Diversity*, ed. Bryan G. Norton (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 205. For Sylvan's original formulation, see Richard Sylvan, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 12-21.

we need to either find more persuasive ways of arguing for the intrinsic value of nature than the last person argument, or describe instrumentalist reasoning in such a way that it does not leave the value of so much of nonhuman nature so susceptible to our changing needs and desires.

For these reasons, it is worth revisiting the instrumental/intrinsic value distinction, or more precisely, the consumptive/non-consumptive distinction within the category of instrumental uses of nature. Pinchot's instrumentalism focused on resource extraction—clearly a consumptive use. Muir's uses of nature are predominately non-consumptive. So far it has been said that basing an environmental ethic on either of these sorts of instrumentalist benefits makes for an insecure justification for environmental protection. Perhaps, however, there is more to the sorts of uses and benefits championed by Muir than is captured under the consumptive/non-consumptive distinction under the instrumental value rubric. Aesthetic, spiritual, and psychological and emotional connections (love, familial feeling, etc.) seem very different from not only material consumption, but also from the generally non-consumptive scientific and medicinal uses. Muir's non-consumptive benefits involve something not obviously captured by the usual notion of a "use." They involve experiences and sentiments of being intimately connected with others, even ecosystems, in such a way that makes the object or entity part of our self-conception or understanding.

Exactly how or to what extent nature can become part of one's own self-conception or understanding no doubt differs from person to person. In contrast to Muir's mystical experiences, Rachel Carson, for example, describes the connection like this: "Each time I enter [a seashore ecosystem], I gain some new awareness of its beauty and

its deeper meanings, sensing that intricate fabric of life by which one creature is linked with another, and each with its surroundings."[16] Martin Buber's notion of an *I-Thou*, in contrast to an *I-It*, relationship provides a possible way of conceptualizing this. Buber argues that we can be in an I-It relationship to things like trees in which we see them as physical things in a world of other physical things—we can measure them or see them as expressions of laws of nature, for example. Or, we can "become bound up in a [I-Thou] relation to it. The tree is now no longer an *It*."[17] This does not involve looking away or imagining the tree to be non-physical; it involves a different experience, an actual *seeing* differently—seeing it as something with which you are in relationship.[18]

If Muir's non-consumptive uses of nature are something of this sort, the dichotomy between intrinsic and instrumental value softens. On the traditional model, things that are instrumentally valuable count morally only in so far as some interest-bearing being cares about it as a thing to be used (though not necessarily consumed). Any obligations we have toward the object would be *to* the interest-bearing being. In contrast, things intrinsically valuable get to count independent of any usefulness to others; they are, in Kantian language, not to be treated as mere means to our ends. Environmental philosophers often strongly favor intrinsic value for ecosystems because it can provide them with (direct) moral considerability. Instrumental value justifies environmental

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[16]Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea* (Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 2. Interestingly, she also describes experiences in nature that more closely resemble those of Muir and Dillard (see ft. nt. 8). Speaking of her observations of ghost crabs, she says: "I was filled with the odd sensation that for the first time I knew the creature in its own world—that I understood, as never before, the essence of its being. In that moment time was suspended." Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, 5.

[17]Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans., Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Collier, 1958), 7 and 8.

[18]Ibid., 7 and 8.

protection only to the extent that this furthers our interests. This is true whether nature has consumptive or non-consumptive instrumental value. The non-consumptive sort (traditionally conceived), which go further to argue for protecting nature, have to be weighed against each other and, more significantly, against the consumptive uses; they often lose out. By treating Muir's non-consumptive uses differently—as relating to people's own self-conception or understanding—healthy ecosystems are no longer simply sources of benefits which can be weighed and traded off for other benefits. To put it differently, the value (still technically instrumental) of nature is tied more tightly to something we take very seriously in moral thinking—the integrity of persons.[19] This is entirely consistent with the further possibility that the environment is intrinsically valuable.

Val Plumwood warns us against taking the notion of self-identity with nature too literally. Some ways of thinking about this can be, she argues, oppressive. The Deep Ecologist Arne Naess, for example, had argued that humans have alienated themselves from the rest of nature and restoring the proper relationship, and hence the proper treatment and protection of nature, requires identifying with it in the sense of having with it a unity of interests. Plumwood argues that appreciating difference is, however, essential to ethically acceptable interactions with others: "We must attain solidarity with the other *in their difference*." Solidarity with wombats does not, for example, mean that

[19]It is difficult to describe this notion that our self-conception or understanding can be tied to our environment with any precision. We might say that it involves seeing ourselves as part of nature and so tied to its fortune, conceptualizing ourselves as people deeply connected to the natural world, or seeing ourselves as essentially part of the natural world recognizing that often our actions negatively impact that world.

we should begin to desire eating grass—others have distinct needs and wants.[20] Nor, and more importantly, should we use the notion of self-identity with nature to employ "unity in a hegemonic fashion to absorb the other or re-create them as a version of the self."[21] Plumwood is careful to point out that she does not think deep ecologists, Naess included, are inclined to use the unity ideal in this negative way, but objects to it being so easily misused. She suggests the alternative approach of engaging with others in a way that "involve[s] a revised conception of the self and its relation to the nonhuman other, opposition to oppressive practices, and the relinquishment and critique of cultural allegiances to the dominance of the human species . . ."[22]

Plumwood is right that identifying with nature should not mean *identity* of selves or interests. If it did, it would be a short move from this idea to the claim that it is acceptable to use nature as a material resource to further our—or *our and nature's*—interests. She complains that deep ecologists place too much emphasis on valuing nature and not enough on the Other's agency. Without going so far as to attribute autonomy to nature, Plumwood's views seem consistent with Buber's concept of an I-Thou relationship, which sees others as beings in which we can be in relation rather than as mere things. I-Thou relationships are those of deep connection, but not identification. Even for Muir, the element of mystical experience involving a loss of awareness of

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[20]Val Plumwood, "Deep Ecology, Deep Pockets, and Deep Problems: A Feminist Ecosocialist Analysis," *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, eds., Eric Katz, et. al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2000), 63. Emphasis in quotation in original.

[21]Ibid., 67.

[22]Ibid., 69.

oneself was only temporary. It was one way of seeing nature which informed the mundane experience of the world, and hence his relationship to it. His experiences led him to seeing nature as deeply mattering to who he was. Nature on this view is no longer simply a resource to be used—either consumptively or non-consumptively. Exactly how such self-identity or understanding with nature functions is unclear. But what is clear is that many people do see themselves as not just materially, but emotionally and psychologically (and even spiritually) connected with the rest of the world, and this seems to not be captured by the traditional distinction between consumptive and non-consumptive uses of nature, and may play an important role in our thinking about protecting the environment. We might say that there are two sorts of (or ways of thinking about) non-consumptive uses of Nature: the traditional notion of nature as a resource to satisfy our interests, and the view that nature is somehow connected intimately with how we see ourselves. Muir's emotional and aesthetic benefits from nature are, for many, more like the latter conception.

All of this has the effect also of weakening the traditional human/nature or artificial/natural distinction because if we took Muir's perspective, we would no longer see ourselves as separate from our environment. These distinctions do not lose the entirety of their usefulness, however. Because we have a choice to either change the world around us a lot or a little, and because when we change it a lot other things happen which we often do not like, it would be useful to be able to label things as more or less changed by human action. There are at least two negative things that tend to happen when we change the environment a lot. First, we begin thinking of ourselves as somehow sharply distinct from everything else in the world (witness children thinking that food

originates at the supermarket). And second, the changes we cause often lead to additional changes we failed to anticipate and did not in fact want. This is what happened, as Carson points out in her famous book *Silent Spring*, when our use of poisons to keep insect populations down resulted in the killing of millions of birds and other animals.[23] Dust bowls, global warming, unsafe water, are three more of a much longer list of unwanted changes in the world caused at least in part by us acting intentionally to alter the world in particular ways. Both of these things—seeing ourselves as distinct from the rest of the world and causing massive changes in the ecosystem—are implicated by people of Muir's persuasion in our sense of loneliness, lack of grounding, and feelings of being unfulfilled. The solution is to reestablish a relationship with our environment.

There are two ways to go from here. First, we might decide that we must protect nature because we need to respect the interests of those people who care about it. These interests become quite weighty when we take them to involve seeing nature in terms of self-conception or understanding. Literally speaking, the value conferred to natural objects in this case remains instrumental, but thinking of the value as so intimately connected to personal identity makes it less likely to fluctuate with our impulses or market forces than would most instrumental uses. Furthermore, such ways of seeing nature need not involve specific or single entities or objects. For many self-identifying "nature-lovers," it is important to know that there are, somewhere, wild herds of caribou and clear water flowing through untrampled mountain meadows even if they will remain unseen. Understanding Muir's "uses" of nature as tying nature directly to people's very self-understanding makes nature's value more stable than would be the case if it were

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[23]Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994).

continually thought of in the traditional sense of instrumental value—i.e., of consumptive and non-consumptive uses where none of these are distinguished as qualitatively different experiences. Respecting other people's conceptions of identity, where this includes living in a healthy environment, entails protecting nature.

An alternative would be to argue that others *ought* to see nature as an important element of *their* self-conception too. This amounts to saying not that Muir's view (the religious elements aside) is simply plausible, but that it is correct—people need experiences of wild nature for a happy and complete life. This is obviously a much stronger claim, and presumably more difficult to defend. Final proof that experiences of nonhumanized nature are emotionally and psychologically beneficial for us all (or most of us) may be difficult to find. Perhaps the most we can do is point to the testimonials of Thoreau, Muir, or Sigurd Olson, or to more recent writers such as Annie Dillard and Gary Snyder. Or we could ask people to try it—to spend time in the not-so-humanized world and see if they feel different, more relaxed, more alive.[24] This is analogous to John Stuart Mill's defense of the claim that some pleasures are qualitatively better than others: we should ask those who have experienced the relevant activities and pleasures which is better. These "experts" will, Mill thinks, agree that intellectual pleasures are superior to mere bodily ones.[25] Whether he is right or not, those who have experienced the (relatively) nonhumanized and humanized worlds, may agree that some time spent in the nonhumanized world is essential to one's health and happiness. In addition, there is some

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[24]As Thoreau pointed out that we do not need to experience particularly wild nature to gain by exposure and interaction with the natural world. If he is right, our environmental protection aims need not, or should not, focus solely on wilderness preservation.

[25]John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett P, 1979), 7-11.

contemporary psychological work demonstrating the positive effects of spending time outdoors away from our highly urbanized lives.[26] Although there is no guarantee that everyone will experience positive personal growth or betterment by spending time in nature, enough people can and do that this should be taken seriously. Because this involves identifying with nature, such concerns cannot simply be an element of cost/benefit analysis pitting consumptive and non-consumptive uses of nature against one another.

Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic

Aldo Leopold had argued that (1) all of ethics have developed around the idea that individuals are members of groups, and that (2) ecology demonstrates that in addition to families and larger social groups, we are also each "a member of a biotic team."[27] Just as we have expanded our moral community from family members to tribes, countries, and finally to all humans, the ecological insights of interrelatedness and interdependence should lead us to expand the community to include all fellow biotic entities. This line of reasoning led Leopold to propose a "Land Ethic" in which, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community . . . . [and] wrong when it tends otherwise."[28]

J. Baird Callicott has spent much of his career arguing for an environmental ethic

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[26]See, for example, Theodore Roszak, et al., eds, *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth Healing the Mind* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995); and, Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1989).

[27]Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, 203 and 205.

[28]Ibid., 224-25.

based on Leopold's work. He initially interpreted the Land Ethic in entirely holistic terms such that individuals are valued only derivatively by their roles in their respective ecosystem(s).[29] Contrary to an animal welfarist view, this would not only allow, but recommend killing deer if an overpopulated deer herd was harming its environment. Much to his credit, Callicott reformulated his use of Leopold to avoid the charge of "eco-fascism" leveled by Tom Regan, who pointed out that if humans too were mere members of ecosystems, they, like the deer, could be sacrificed for the good of the ecosystems.[30] On Callicott's revised view, the Land Ethic is both individualistic and holistic. In fact Leopold seems to suggest this by saying that, "It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."[31] Furthermore, obligations are most weighty to the most central community, and the members there in, of family. As we expand outward to other relatives and friends, to larger social communities, to all fellow humans, to animals, and finally to ecosystemic communities, our obligations lessen. "Outer" obligations do, however, limit the acceptable ways of fulfilling more inner duties. The concentric circle model of moral considerability does not suppose, then, that outer circle obligations to ecosystems supplant prior, or more central ones to fellow humans.[32]

In addition to Regan's objection, Callicott takes seriously Kristin Shrader-

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[29]See: J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics* 2.4 (1980): 311-38.

[30]Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: U California P, 1983), 361-63.

[31]Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 204. Quoted by Callicott in support of his revised interpretation of the Land Ethic in "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic." *Companion to* A Sand County Almanac: *Interpretive and Critical Essays*, ed., J. Baird Callicott (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1987), 196.

[32]J. Baird Callicott, "Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism," *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1999), 70-72.

Frechette's complaint that if the Land Ethic is indeed both individualistic and holistic, we are in need of second order principles and priority rankings to tell us when to emphasize one and when the other, or how to balance competing claims.[33] Callicott notes in response that although Leopold himself does not furnish such principles, two such second order principles can nonetheless be derived from his work:

> SOP1: "Obligations generated by membership in more venerable and intimate communities take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities."
>
> SOP2: "Stronger interests (for lack of a better word) generate duties that take precedence over duties generated by weaker interests."

According to SOP1, obligations to one's children are greater than those to the children of strangers, though according to SOP2 obligations to feed starving children of strangers outweigh any to lavish our own.[34] SOP1 is essentially the response just mentioned above to the complaint of eco-fascism. It articulates the belief that as our moral circle expands, obligations to members of more intimate communities not only remain intact, but take (all else being equal) precedence. This principle is very much in line with a Humean approach to ethics since we tend to have much stronger moral sentiments to our family members than to strangers. To the extent that pets are seen as members of our human families and farm animals as members of slightly larger (and generally less intimate) communities, it can also cut across species lines.[35]

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[33]Ibid., 72.

[34]Ibid., 73.

[35]For an interesting discussion of human–nonhuman animal communities see: Mary Midgley, "The Mixed Community," *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1983), 112-24.

Did Callicott, however, however, rob his theory of its environmental teeth by trying to satisfy the individualists? Gary Varner, for one, complains that it allows us to always side with the interests of other people over nature since people are always part of our closest communities. In a contest between spotted owls and logging jobs, environmentalists following the Land Ethic must always vote against the owls and their old-growth forest habitat.[36] Callicott responds by pointing out that although SOP1 might get such a result, SOP2 obliges us to save the forests. The lives and well-being of the owls and the continuation of the old-growth ecosystem represent a much more serious set of interests than does a few thousand logging jobs.[37] Jobs, after all, can be developed elsewhere. At the very least, this case is open to judgment, not decidable by an automatic favoring of the members of more intimate communities.

The philosophical basis for Leopold's expanding circle is, according to Callicott, Humean. Hume supplies the answer to the problem of introducing a normative element to a theory based on ecological awareness. In brief, Humean ethics sees our moral obligations as arising out of our considered sentimental responses to others and their actions. Reason plays an informing role by helping us sort out the relevant facts, see relationships between things, and generally organize our thinking. But it is the sentiments that provides the foundation of ethics. As Hume points it:

> What is intelligible, what is evident, what is probable, what is true, procures only the cool assent of the understanding; and gratifying a speculative curiosity, puts an end to our research. Extinguish all the warm

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[36]Callicott, "Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism," 74.

[37]Ibid., 74-75.

> feelings and prepossessions in favour of virtue, and all disgust or aversion to vice: Render men totally indifferent towards these distinctions; and morality is no longer a practical study, nor has any tendency to regulate our lives and actions.[38]

Elsewhere, having drawn some analogies between aesthetic and moral judgment, he argues that our evaluation of an object's beauty does not consist merely in the "proportion, relation, and position of parts," discoverable by reason.[39] Rather, these things inform our sentiments, and hence our aesthetic judgments. The same is true in the case of moral evaluations.

Callicott uses Darwin to provide an explanation of how, as Hume says, "nature has made [the moral sentiments] universal in the whole species."[40] On Callicott's reading, Darwin suggests that parental and filial affections enabled small human kin groups to form. Of these groups, those which were more altruistic had better survival rates, thus selecting for such sentiments. As larger groups formed and competed against one another, natural affections, kindness, sympathy, and the like, expanded as greater cooperation was necessary for them to survive.[41] Presumably, somewhere in this story natural selection gives way to social selection, where ways of thinking and behaving are passed to subsequent generations through cultural rather than biological means. The details of the Darwinian account, however, are not important here. What is important is

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[38]David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed., J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett P, 1983), 15.

[39]Ibid., 86.

[40]Ibid., 15.

[41]Callicott, "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species," 148-49.

that there is a plausible naturalistic explanation for ethics through the evolution of altruistic feelings consistent with Hume's belief that ethics is grounded in our emotional experiences. This is important for Callicott specifically because he needs a way of getting moral considerability for wholes that does not depend on the possession of intrinsic (as opposed to relational) properties which confer moral considerability in the way possessing interests does for individuals. Hume's sentimentalist approach may provide a way around the problem that there appear to be no such moral considerability-conferring properties for wholes.

Callicott, following Leopold, thinks that some sort of fellow-feeling, brought on by an awareness that we humans are members of a quite interdependent biotic community, would push us to consider ecosystems as morally considerable. Ecological knowledge is supposed to inform a positive sentimental response with respect to the biotic community because it is a community in which we live and because we have hard-wired in, as it were, community oriented altruistic feelings. Callicott approvingly quotes Hume as saying, "It appears that a tendency to publick good, and to the promoting of peace, harmony, and order in society, does always by affecting the benevolent principles of our frame engage us on the side of the social virtues."[42] The ultimate source of a holistic environmental ethic is, then, moral sentiments originating in naturally selected for fellow-feelings.[43] So in response to the complaint that the Land Ethic lacks teeth, Callicott argues that although our moral sentiments are stronger with respect to family

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[42]Callicott, "Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism," 67.

[43]Such an approach to ethics fits our commonsense view that we owe special obligations to our children and others close to us and fits the care-ethic insight that we have these special obligations at least in part because of emotionally laden relationships.

members and other people, they are also generated by the community insight of ecology, thereby justifying SOP2's demand that we chose the interests of ecosystems over humans when the interests of ecosystems are the more vital.

An immediate concern is whether recognizing our interrelatedness and dependence on the rest of nature will lead to holism or to embracing the Land Ethic as merely a prudentially good idea. Is there too large a jump from the descriptive ecological insights to the normative claims of eco-holism? Callicott thinks not. He approvingly describes Leopold's view as involving a shift in values or paradigms: "Ecology changes our values by changing our concepts of the world and of ourselves in relation to the world."[44] This is suggestive, but not conclusive. Reason does inform our emotional reactions, thereby impacting our moral judgments, as it does in our thinking regarding other interest-bearing organisms. But we have precise reasons for extending moral considerability to these other organisms. Leopold's expanding circle, on the other hand, may leave us (not necessarily as individuals, but as a society) short of granting moral standing to wholes. Whether it does or not is an empirical question.

In response to this concern, I would like to make two related points. First, my goal here is not to defend any particular version of eco-holism beyond saying that individualistic accounts fall short of justifying many environmentalists' desired level of environmental protection and their intuition that nonhuman nature should be protected regardless of its usefulness to us. More work needs to be done to know if Leopold's evolutionary and ecological story will get us to holism regarding ecosystems. However,

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[44]J. Baird Callicott, "Hume's *Is/Ought* Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic," *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1989), 127.

what is apparent is that the standard approach which looks for intrinsic properties in things as conferring moral considerability does not work well with respect to ecosystems. A Humean sentimentalist approach focusing on relationships and communities, as an explanation of where moral beliefs and values come from, could provide an alternative route for this goal that also can account for moral considerability for individual organisms. Second, as a framework for understanding ethics, a Humean approach seems particularly apt at making room for the existence of inconsistent and incommensurable moral beliefs and values, one pair of which might be individualism and holism. It does so by recognizing the possibility of more than one sort of sentimental reaction to any situation.

Other concerns arise as well. First, it is not clear what "interest" means with respect to ecosystems. How do we know what is best for an ecosystem or what a "healthy" ecosystem is? What do Leopold's notions of protecting *integrity*, *stability*, and *beauty* of an ecosystem mean? This is related in part to a second concern: What constitutes an ecosystem? It is unclear whether, for example, it would be a particular river, the surrounding woods or grass lands, the Great Lakes basin, North America, or the entire earth. Because of these worries, it is not clear how we are to make use of SOP2. Furthermore, Singer's argument might fit a Humean approach better than as first appears. We have, as a matter of fact, fellow-feelings, sympathy, and the like towards other humans, which, on a Humean account would underlie our moral systems. Reason should demonstrate that many nonhuman animals share the very characteristics (in particular, that of being sentient) with humans which seem to be the most relevant to our caring for other humans. Reason would thereby inform us of the need to include many nonhuman

animals in our moral purview much as reason for Hume might impact how we felt aesthetically about a work of art. It is not our initial sentimental reactions that determine our moral evaluations, but reactions checked by reason. It is more difficult, though, to see how a sense of ecological interdependence is to inform our moral sentiments regarding ecosystems. My dependence on sunshine or water (however indirect and nonreciprocal) does not lead me to conclude that it is morally considerable. The interdependence found in ecosystems seems to push us towards taking care of it *for ourselves* and any other interested beings involved. But even if we could begin seeing nature as being morally considerable, the Humean approach, informed by ecology, would not provide for much teeth in terms of environmental protection. Our sentiments will still be, and are more reasonably, deeper with respect to other people and nonhuman animals.

The notion that some ways of valuing nature involve a sense of identity or self-understanding involving nature may go some way towards "pulling in" ecosystems more closely towards the center of our moral circle. It could do so because it ties the ecosystem's well-being (and hence protection) closely with people's conceptions of themselves. Ecosystems, then, can become part of our core self-understanding in a way that does not rely simply on the awareness of ecological interdependence, though for many, no doubt, a sense of interdependence brought on by ecological science enhances this. And in fact, the science of ecology could inform our vision of what an ideal ecosystem looks like—if we want it to be fairly untouched by humans, for example, we would lean towards favoring a dynamic rather than static ecosystem, as suggested by ecology. It is worth mentioning that this notion of a Buber or Muir-like relationship with our environment is not meant to replace, but to add to Callicott's development of

Leopold's argument from ecological knowledge to communal feelings. In addition, it is consistent with Callicott's use of Hume because in both cases it is our sentimental reactions to nature that ground our moral thinking regarding it.

As a Humean approach to ethics, however, Callicott's expanding circle model (and my elaboration) faces the serious objection that if moral claims (e.g., that natural entities, even ecosystems, are morally considerable) are subjective (i.e., arising from our experiences and emotional reactions), how is it that they could be at all objective such that we could say that everyone should think such and such? Would not Callicott's Humean moral claims be relative to people or groups of people who happen to think as Leopold did about their environment? This issue must be addressed before proceeding further. Only if we can show that a Humean approach could avoid the problem of relativism is it worth returning to the questions regarding people's reactions to nature and moral considerability, and understanding Callicott's model of an expanding moral community.

Humean Ethics and the Problem of Relativism

In order to evaluate the charge of moral relativism leveled against any Humean approach to ethics, I would like to discuss Hume's work directly. This is in part due to the fact that much of the writing regarding this issue is grounded firmly in Hume's texts themselves. My aim here, though, is much less that of defending *Hume's* ethics than that of defending a *Humean approach to* ethics. Nevertheless, what is said here about Hume is, I believe, applicable to Callicott's use of a Humean approach to ethics.

The relevant complaint against Hume for our purposes is that his sentimentalism gives him a subjectivist meta-theory which is inconsistent with his giving us any particular set of substantive ethical claims (or our developing our own) since the subjectivist account cannot favor any particular set of substantive claims such as Warren's principles. As I see it, there exist three probable responses: (a) intersubjective agreement might provide a sufficient source of objectivity such that this problem can be avoided, (b) no inconsistency exists because subjectivist meta-theories leave room for any—including Hume's—substantive claims, or (c) the problem fails to materialize for Hume because his substantive claims are not normative, but merely descriptive. At first glance, the most promising seems to be (c), except that in the end this limits Hume more than either he or we may wish. Although he does say he is giving a descriptive account of ethics, Hume also seems to hope that his work will provide some normative value as well. If so, we need to consider (a) or (b), of which (a) looks to be the better solution. Before moving ahead too far with this, however, it is worth laying out the central elements of Hume's moral theory.

There are three main parts to Hume's overall moral theory: an argument for a sentimentalist meta-ethics, a defense of a certain method of investigation, and a description of a set of particular substantive claims. We are more concerned with the relationship between these elements than with his substantial moral claims since unlike Hume, we are here thinking about the special case of nonhuman animals and the environment. His argument for a sentimentalist meta-ethics consists of both a negative argument that reason is not the foundation of substantive ethical claims and a

positive argument claiming that sentiment is.

Hume begins his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (hereafter: the *Second Enquiry*), by joining an ongoing debate regarding the foundations of moral beliefs which revolved around the question of whether ethics is derived from reason or from sentiment; that is, "whether we attain the knowledge of [ethical beliefs] by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense."[45] He thought there was much confusion on this matter. While virtue theorists spoke of virtue as conformity to reason but typically described virtue in terms of sentiment, other thinkers spoke of virtue and vice but thought of ethics as grounded in universal abstract principles.[46] Unhappy with this, Hume asks us to imagine what morality would consist of if we used only reason to arrive at its principles. His answer is that we would have only "cool assent" and not the passion needed to mark things as virtuous or vicious (his preferred ethical terms), which is needed to motivate our actions.[47] That is, reason alone cannot account for our moral beliefs—we would be morally indifferent to matters of fact if we employed only reason. Similarly, our evaluations regarding beauty are not derived from reason alone—no amount of reason can, without sentiment, lead us to describe something as beautiful. A similar argument can be found in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (hereafter: *Treatise*), in which he says "Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood [sic]. . . . Whatever,

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[45]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 13.

[46]Ibid., 14.

[47]Ibid., 15.

therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. Now 'tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement," and can therefore not be the result of only reason.[48]

This is not to say that reason has no role to play in ethical and aesthetic value judgments. On the contrary; reason is quite important. It is needed to sort out the details of particular situations, giving us more accurate information from which our sentiments can make a proper judgment.[49] Likewise, in Book III of the *Treatise*, he says that reason can play two roles with respect to moral thinking. It "excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it," and it helps us discover the relevant connections between causes and effects, which in turn informs our sentiments.[50] This is, in brief, his argument for a sentimentalist meta-ethics, which is often described as a non-cognitive theory due to the foundational role of emotion rather than reason.

Hume's self-expressed goal is to discover the origin of moral belief, which he hopes will also shed more light on the relationship between sentiment and reason.[51] He describes his preferred method of inquiry as the "experimental method," which for him consists of discovering general maxims through the empirical study of particulars.

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[48]David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 2nd ed., eds., L. A. Selby-Bigge P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1978), 458.

[49]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 15.

[50]Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 459.

[51]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 15.

In the case at hand, this involves looking at which qualities—habits, sentiments, or faculties—of a person are objects of esteem or contempt.[52] What we desire or admire in ourselves and others is what we call virtues; what we despise we call vices.[53] As will later become important, Hume seems to have an unwavering belief that all humans share a certain sensibility with respect to what we take as virtuous and vicious.[54] This belief is one of the reasons he thinks an empirical study of particulars will lead to general principles regarding the foundation of ethics.

Hume's strategy for developing a list of substantive ethical claims is to ask which characteristics we in fact deem praiseworthy and why we judge them to be such; or, what quality(s) is shared by virtues which distinguishes them from vices. In addition to this distinction, Hume separates out various kinds of virtue and vice, such as those qualities useful to ourselves (e.g., discretion), immediately agreeable to ourselves (e.g., cheerfulness), and immediately agreeable to others (e.g., good manners and wit).[55] For our purposes, there is no need to spend much time detailing his lists, though a couple of virtues will be briefly mentioned to illuminate his project. It is worth re-emphasizing that this aspect of his work is meant to be empirical—he is not coming up with a list of virtues *a priori* and then looking to see who has them, but is looking to what people actually take to be virtues and vices.

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[52]Ibid., 16.

[53]Ibid., 85.

[54]See, for example: Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 75.

[55]Ibid., 51, 61, and 68.

Hume begins his discussion of virtue in the *Second Enquiry* by describing benevolence—by which he means being sociable, humane, friendly, generous, and the like—as that quality which is universally regarded as the highest merit.[56] Everyone asked, Hume insists, will cite the happiness benevolence brings to others as the reason it is so highly regarded.[57] The utility resulting from this virtue is the source of our positive sentimental response. Hume supports his claim that utility plays a central role in such evaluations by reminding us that most people would agree that giving money generously to a beggar is looked upon favorably only when it relieves distress, not when it encourages idleness.[58] Similarly, luxury is approved of only when it does not cause corruption or other things which lessen the happiness of society.[59] Benevolence is something we praise precisely because it furthers utility.

Justice is a bit more complex, but it too gains our approval due to its utility. It no longer impacts our sentiments, for example, when there is no shortage of goods and the notion of property becomes meaningless (justice for Hume exists to regulate property).[60] It is only when it serves to further society's well-being that it impresses us as good. The sentiment arising with respect to justice is the result of our reflecting on its utility to society and not simply due to any benefit conferred directly to ourselves.

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[56]Ibid., 17.

[57]Ibid., 18.

[58]Ibid., 19.

[59]Ibid., 20.

[60]Ibid., 21.

That is, justice arises due to our awareness that its rules can benefit us all in the long run, even if a particular act, in accordance with the expectations of justice, does not benefit us. There is, then, an interesting mix of self-interest and concern for others involved in our sentimental response to justice. While "self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice . . . a sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation which attends that virtue."[61]

We might wonder, however, on what grounds Hume argues that self-interest is not the only thing which stimulates a positive emotional response in us. The quality shared by those things we look upon favorably—i.e., that which one's sentiment takes to indicate virtue—is utility, or usefulness. We approve of those things (actions, personal characteristics, etc.) which further happiness and satisfaction for ourselves and our community.[62] Given this emphasis on utility, one might assume that Hume ends up embracing egoism. That is, if it is *our* sentiment—our feelings of approval and disapproval—that determine whether we call something virtuous or vicious (whether we embrace it or despise it), is it not simply *our* happiness which directs our thinking and action? This is an important question because if Hume is an egoist we might wish to consider him only in terms of the evolution of ethical thought rather than as someone particularly useful for our own moral thinking—egoism, after all, would seem to provide little reason to suppose that we could develop principles specifying obligations to others, much less to nonhuman animals or the environment.

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[61]Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 499 and 500.

[62]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 18.

Hume was quite conscious of the egoist objection, arguing throughout both the *Treatise* and *Second Enquiry* that egoism is not consistent with experience. We often, Hume argues, "bestow praise on virtuous actions . . . where the utmost subtilty of imagination would not discover any appearance of self interest, or find any connexion of our present happiness and security with events so widely separated from us."[63] And, although we might feel more strongly about things which impact our own interests, the things we praise are those which apply to interests well beyond our own private sphere. In fact, we often try to convince others as well that they should feel positively about something without trying to convince them that they will gain from that which we want them to praise.[64] It is needless to ask, he adds, why it is that we have fellow-feelings with respect to others and enough that we see that we do in fact have them: "No man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others."[65] Similarly, Hume argues in the *Treatise* that although we often love ourselves more than we do others, it is unusual that our "kind affections" do not overcome our self-interest.[66] I am quite inclined to go along with Hume here without argument—describing all of our actions in terms of self-interests does seem to misdescribe our experience.[67]

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[63]Ibid., 40 and 41.

[64]Ibid., 41.

[65]Ibid., 41, fnt. 19.

[66]Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 487.

[67]Hume's focus on utility might also lead us to think of him as a utilitarian. Perhaps there are two questions here: to what extent should we think of Hume as a utilitarian and if he is one, why would it matter? If he is a utilitarian in the sense of, for example, Bentham or Mill—that is, if he subscribes to the

One obvious difference between Hume and the alternative theories of Kantianism and utilitarianism (as it is usually construed, *a la* Bentham and Mill, for example) is that Hume has given us a non-cognitive account of morality. That is, ethical beliefs are not, on his theory, to be thought of as being literally true or false since they are arrived at not through reason, but through sentiment.[68] However, this gets us to the issue with which we are most concerned with respect to Callicott's environmental ethics: Does a Humean ethic, as a non-cognitive ethical theory, give us a rich enough notion of ethics that it can provide us with guidance in our lives, or does it end up allowing anything to count as good or bad depending on personal taste, thereby leaving us with little or no guidance? In other words, does it result in relativism? The issue can be cast as two questions: First, is there an internal inconsistency in his work in that he has given us both a non-cognitivist meta-theory and a set of particular substantive claims of the sort the former cannot support? Or, to put it in terms of the project here, does it allow for the sorts of substantive claims

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principle that we should do only that which leads to the greatest good for the greatest number (the principle of utility)—Hume would be susceptible to the common objection that his ethics could lead to (or perhaps require) the violation of individual rights. That is, if violating someone's rights would lead to satisfaction of the principle of utility better than some other action, it would be, contrary to common belief, the right thing to do. Similarly, in order to continually act in ways that bring the greatest happiness to the world, we might be forced to give up our life-projects, which are needed to have fulfilled lives (See: Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, eds., Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie (New York: Oxford U P, 1998), 574-76.). Hume is not, however, a utilitarian—at least not of the sort who uses the notion of utility to derive rules of conduct, either with respect to particular cases or more generally as a rule-utilitarian might. Nowhere does he suggest that we make calculations regarding what would lead to the greatest good for the greatest number. In fact, our aim in life is to have a good life, which includes, but is not limited to, living in a community in which others are also living good lives. We would not find acts which violate others' interests as satisfactory on Hume's account; our sentimental judgment would not approve of such actions.

[68]Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 458.

Warren, for example, provides? And second, does this leave him with the undesirable consequence of relativism?

Francis Snare explains the problem well in his book *Morals, Motivation and Convention.* Sentimentalism is a meta-ethical theory in that "it is a claim about the nature of moral judgments and not (not obviously, at any rate) itself one of the substantive moral judgements it is about."[69] And as just mentioned, it is a non-cognitive ethical theory in that it claims that morality is not founded on reason, but sentiment. As such, we would expect it to be neutral with respect to normative claims in the sense that such claims are neither true nor false.[70] But clearly Hume does give us particular substantive moral claims—e.g., that justice is a virtue, it involves certain duties, etc. (in anticipation of one possible solution to this potential problem, I will, for the moment, assume that Hume's substantive moral claims are normative in character). There is a potentially devastating problem here: Hume's sentimentalism cannot help him justify his particular substantive claims (or the substantive elements of an environmental ethic) because that sentimentalism must remain neutral with respect to particular normative claims. Is Hume stuck with radical relativism? If morality is simply a matter of feeling, is there anything even resembling objectivity in morality? I think the answer to this question is both yes and no.

Snare first develops the negative answer to this question. He defines a subjective judgment (*j*) as one in which it is possible for one person to claim *j* and

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[69]Francis Snare, *Morals, Motivation and Convention: Hume's Influential Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1991), 147.

[70]Ibid., 148.

another *not j* with neither of them being necessarily wrong. An objective judgment (*d*) is one in which disagreement (i.e., one person claiming *d* and another *not d*) entails that one of them is wrong.[71] With respect to meta-ethical positions, then, a subjectivist theory is one in which particular moral judgments are subjective in this sense, while an objectivist theory is one in which particular moral judgments are objective. He adds, "all non-cognitivist theories are subjectivist in this sense, holding as they do that moral judgments are not the sort of thing to be true *or false*."[72] But, while subjectivist meta-theories cannot justify any particular normative claims, there is no necessary inconsistency in holding a subjectivist meta-ethical theory while simultaneously holding some particular view regarding normative claims. The normative claims would not, by the above definitions, be objective.[73] The question remains, however, whether Hume is in fact a subjectivist who is thereby stuck with relativism, a condition which would, as with the issue of egoism, make his ethical theory *prima facie* less than attractive for our purposes of developing an environmental ethic.

As mentioned, there seems to be at least three ways to respond to this problem: (a) intersubjective agreement might provide a sufficient source of objectivity that this problem can be avoided, that (b) no inconsistency exists because subjectivist meta-theories leave room for any—including Hume's—substantive claims, or that (c) no problem exists because his substantive claims are not normative, but merely

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[71]Ibid., 154.

[72]Ibid., 154. Emphasis in original.

[73]Ibid., 155 and 156.

descriptive. I would like to quickly dismiss (b) as unattractive because although it might solve the problem of there being an inconsistency between Hume's meta-theory and his giving us a set of particular substantive claims (there is no necessary inconsistency between holding a subjectivist meta-ethical theory and also holding a particular set of normative claims as long as these do not depend upon some sort of objectivist meta-ethics),[74] it does nothing to solve the problem of relativism arising due to an inability to use his meta-theory to support his particular substantive claims.

It might be that Hume has plenty of room to maneuver with respect to option (a). It is possible that additional contingent facts (such as human nature) could be used to demonstrate that people would not actually disagree with respect to moral evaluations. Hume does think that human nature is such that there will be one agreed upon answer (in the sense of *actual* agreement) to at least some moral claims. In other words, Hume might avoid charges of relativism brought about by an inability to use his meta-theoretical sentimentalism to support his substantive claims by trading subjectivism for intersubjective agreement. This would supply his theory with objectivity enough to allow him to develop normative claims without being subjected to the criticism of relativism. The question then becomes whether, or to what extent, he can do so.

Kate Abramson sets up the general problem quoting from Philippa Foot: "Now, this theory of Hume's about moral sentiment commits him to a subjectivist theory of ethics. . . . For if [moral judgments] were objective . . . there would have to

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[74]Ibid., 157 and 158.

be some method of deciding, in case of disagreement, whether one man's opinion or another's was correct."[75] The specific problem Abramson focuses on is that people's sentimental response to situations in which they are not intimately involved (but yet share a great deal with respect to values, etc.) seems likely to vary a great deal. Hume says we are to put ourselves in a position with respect to the person whose character is in question such that the possible variety of sympathetic responses is limited. We should set aside our own interests and take a "general survey" in which we think in terms of those who would have close contact with that person.[76] But, questions arise such as whether we are to "consider only those in an agent's 'narrow circle' of intimates and acquaintances . . . [or] some more idealized version of that group."[77] After considering several options, Abramson decides, in Hume's favor, that we can control the variability of sympathetic responses in cases which are distant from our own particular situation. The details of her solution are too complex to go into here, except to say that it involves six steps which, she thinks, could sufficiently restrict sentimental variation that intersubjective agreement is possible. These include such things as focusing only on those people who would typically be affected by the character or trait in question and by seeing the trait as one we are all subject to by virtue of being human.[78]

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[75]Kate Abramson, "Correcting Our Sentiments about Hume's Moral Point of View," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37 (1999): 333.

[76]Ibid., 337 and 338.

[77]Ibid., 338.

[78]Ibid., 349 and 350.

One reason for not spending considerably more time with Abramson's arguments is that it seems that even if she is right, there is a more significant problem with the possibility of any significant level of intersubjective agreement. The problem of variability of sentimental responses in cases distant from one's own situation is, of course, aggravated by the fact of multiculturalism in the world. It has recently been pointed out that although there are currently some 180 independent states, there are 600 living languages and 5000 ethnic groups.[79] Out of this difference, however, comes a potentially more difficult problem for intersubjective agreement than simply trying to limit the kind of variability of sentiment which naturally arises in cases in which we are not intimately involved but yet share general values with others. Cultural difference increases the possibility of pluralism as described by Isaiah Berlin.

Berlin has argued that people's values clash not only because people often make mistakes in thinking about what is right, but because some good and perfectly reasonable values cannot be simultaneously maximized. For example, "rigorous justice," an absolute value for some, is not entirely compatible with the ideal of compassion, also held as a fundamental value by many. Such disagreement lies at a rather deep level—both values are seen as fundamental or basic to our moral lives, yet they often clash. Indeed, this conflict can even occur, according to Berlin, within a single person. People have very different conceptions of the proper ends to which to dedicate one's life, which determine, in part, the values they hold more or less

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[79]Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1995), 1.

tenaciously. Berlin, like Hume, does not think there exist a set of objective moral truths in the sense that they exist independent of human life and are waiting to be "discovered," and suggests that fundamental values and conceptions of the good life can clash without one being more "right" than another.[80]

If Berlin is right, it seems that there is little chance for significant intersubjective agreement across cultures—the differences between cultures might well be so fundamental that we are actually incapable of evaluating a distant situation as if we were one of the intimate group of a person whose traits are in question. On the other hand, as Abramson has said, it is not clear to what extent Hume needs cross-cultural agreement in order to gain a satisfactory level of objectivity to avoid charges of relativism.

Snare suggests a different way to think about Hume: we should see Hume's work with respect to substantive claims not as an attempt at a normative ethics, but as merely a description (option (c) above). That is, Hume is not arguing that we *should* have a positive sentimental response to benevolence and justice, but that we *do*. This descriptive account poses no problem to the claim that a non-cognitive meta-theory cannot (at least not without the objectivity possible with intersubjective agreement) support any particular normative claims since Hume has not given us normative claims. As Snare put it, "the conclusions of [Hume's] investigation are not themselves moral judgments."[81]

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[80]Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 10.

[81]Snare, *Morals, Motivation and Convention*, 173.

If we return to the *Second Enquiry*, we find that Hume does not commit the mistake of using his sentimentalist meta-theory itself as a reason to argue for a particular ethical view. That is, he does not say that we *should* (in a moral sense) accept the normative claims he lays out, but that we, because of our human nature, *do* accept these: "But I forget, that it is not my present business to recommend generosity and benevolence, or to paint, in their true colours, all the genuine charms of the social virtues. . . . But our object here being more the speculative than the practical part of morals."[82] Hume's substantive claims are based on empirical facts (at least according to Hume) such as that we have certain feelings of approval toward some things and feelings of disapproval toward others, and that all people share these experiences.

But, a possible objection comes to mind. How can Hume talk about duties without saying this is what we *ought* to do—to say something is a duty is to say we ought to do it. In Hume's case, we have a duty to further utility.[83] Whereas Bentham or Mill argue that we have a duty to maximize happiness and minimize pain, Hume merely says we do in fact respond positively towards things which further utility. In doing so, he has not given us a general normative rule of the sort given by the various sorts of utilitarianisms.[84] To say we have a duty with respect to utility is, for Hume, merely describing what we do take to be our duty; he asks "whether every man, who has any regard to his own happiness and welfare, will not best find his account in the

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[82]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 17 and 18.

[83]See, for example: Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 19.

[84]See: William K. Frankena, *Ethics* 2nd (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 34-43.

practice of every moral duty."[85] He is not making some general normative claim here but suggesting what role duty plays in people's lives. So again, it is possible to make sense of a discussion of duty without assuming that such duties are being praised or blamed.

But, if this is how we should resolve the problem of relativism, it is not at all clear how a Humean approach would help us in developing an environmental ethics with some legitimacy. And in fact, there is some evidence which suggests that Hume himself wanted to be making not only descriptive, but prescriptive claims. First, early in the *Second Enquiry* he says "The end of all moral speculations is to teach us our duty" and help us form certain habits.[86] This sounds like the end of moral speculation involves more than teaching us what it is that we already think is our duty. Hume seems to be saying that it would be good if his descriptive account were to inform further thinking and acting. A similar line of thought can be seen in a passage near the end of the text in which he hopes his work will "contribute to the amendment of men's lives, and their improvement in morality and social virtue. And, though the philosophical truth of any proposition by no means depends on its tendency to promote the interests of society; yet a man has but a bad grace, who delivers a theory, however true, which, he must confess, leads to a practice dangerous and pernicious."[87] Both of these passages indicate a move, or a desire to move, beyond the merely

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[85]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 79.

[86]Ibid., 14.

[87]Ibid., 79.

descriptive. However, neither of these passages needs to be read as inconsistent with his aim of providing a purely descriptive account of moral thinking. He seems merely to be saying that his descriptive account—that which he gives us in the texts—might be used to further our moral thinking and action in ways consistent with our sentiments.

Regardless, it is an important question whether we want a Humean account to be limited to so purely a descriptive account. That is, what good is Hume's ethical theory if it cannot provide guidance in our lives—i.e., does not tell us what to do and not to do? There are a couple of points that can be made. First, as Snare suggests, accepting Hume's conclusions might provide guidance in the sense that we might be even more likely to approve of the kinds of things he says we already do, or be directed more firmly with respect to things already approved.[88] We might become better at cultivating those things which further utility if we have a better understanding of our psychological responses to them. Second, what do we expect when we ask this question? If we are expecting some objective universal truth existing to be discovered, then we are already prejudiced against Hume. Although it might be difficult, we might need to set aside our preconceived notions of what morality consists of and consider whether Hume is on to something here or not.

One way of thinking about, or pulling together, the above issues is to first accept that Hume is quite wrong regarding the lack of difference that exists in the world and the possibility of finding intersubjective agreement on all matters. But he

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[88]Snare, *Morals, Motivation and Convention*, 173 and 174.

may nonetheless be right about his description of what ethics is, and even his catalog of particular virtues and vices. What is good and right might well be determined by our sentimental responses; there may be no objective truth to our ethical beliefs in the sense that they exist independent of our emotional reactions to people and situations. But Hume's appeal to universal agreement, which might get us objectivity in the sense of intersubjective agreement, cannot be maintained in light of the great diversity of moral beliefs in the world, the different sources of value, and the inconsistency between many of these values. It is likely that there is some such agreement across cultures with respect to things such as torture and genocide, but, as Berlin has argued, such is not the case with many other important issues, even within a single person. The fact that all of us, regardless of culture, are humans living human lives, however, is likely to limit the range of our sentimental reactions to things, and hence the possible sets of moral beliefs. We would have many, but not an infinite number of substantial ethical beliefs, depending at least in part upon our communities and upbringing. We would have, then, a great variety of ethical views, all growing out of our experiences living the lives we do with one another. If we are attracted to Hume's naturalistic sentimentalist approach to ethics, we can recognize the diversity in the world, without having to accept an unwanted relativism.

Conclusion

Pinchot's view of nature as a material resource to be consumed, though consumed carefully to maximize long-term benefit for all citizens, seems often to be the reigning

paradigm in the American attitude toward the environment. This is an improvement over the short-sighted aims of many of Pinchot's contemporaries who wanted the government to divest itself of all public lands and regulatory responsibilities. It is also much more environmentally friendly than that of some of our more recent conservative American administrations overseeing our public lands and corporations engaged in resource extraction. By itself, though, an environmental ethic based on even long-term consumptive benefits of nature is limited in terms of how much environmental protection it can justify. It is consistent with monoculture tree farms in place of original forests, the leasing of public grass lands to cattle ranchers, and the damming of rivers for irrigation.

Early in his life. Muir (at one time a good friend of the younger Pinchot) had spent a summer herding a California sheep farmer's animals up into the Sierra Nevada to graze. But seeing what they did to the native vegetation, led him to call them "hoofed locusts."[89] Later in his life he fought hard against the proposal to dam Hetch Hetchy Canyon, just north of Yosemite Valley, in order to supply water for the city of San Francisco. The depth of his love and connection with nature can be seen in his exclamation: "Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man."[90] He thought both that nature was imbued with divine spirit and that experiences in nature could help people be more psychologically and emotionally healthy: nature exists to sooth our pain and to "heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike."[91] In a world in which Muir's particular

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[89]John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (N.P.: Canongate Classics, 1988), 32.

[90]John Muir, *The Yosemite* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 197.

[91]Ibid., 192.

religious beliefs are rejected by both the secular and religious, it is this psychological betterment argument which has more potential to provide us with a viable environmental ethic. Muir's uses of nature are, in contrast to Pinchot's, distinctly non-consumptive.

I argued above, however, that this is still unlikely to satisfy many environmentally minded people. First, it does not conform to their convictions that nature should be protected independent of any, even non-consumptive, usefulness to us. This criticism could perhaps be minimized if an instrumentalist approach could be shown to justify a quite rigorous level of environmental protection. This is unlikely to happen, however, if non-consumptive benefits are conceived in terms of uses on par with other uses—that is, to be simply weighted against each other in a type of cost/benefit analysis. It is hard to imagine, for example, that the aesthetic uses of Hetch Hetchy could have won over the material interests of the city of San Francisco, unless such places had been reduced to an exceedingly rare number. Any environmental ethic that had to wait for natural areas to become rare, though, would not be very attractive. On the other hand, when all the non-consumptive uses of nature are added together, a good deal of the non-humanized world could be protected. Even here, though, it seems that many things in the environment could be altered or destroyed without impacting too seriously on our non-consumptive benefits, or at least not in a way in which these could not be made up for by consumptive benefits.

One way to make rigorous environmental protection even more likely would be to understand Muir's particular non-consumptive uses of nature as involving our self-conceptions or understandings. As we see from writers such as Muir, Carson, and Dillard, people who care deeply for the natural world do not see it as an object to be used

in the usual sense, even non-consumptively. This is a matter more of attitude or approach than it is a technical distinction, but it does tie the well-being or health of nature more closely to something we all care very much about: our own self-conceptions. This is not, however, a suggestion that nature cannot also have intrinsic value.

Callicott is one who argues for the moral consideration of ecosystems themselves. In brief, he builds on Leopold's notion that ethics grows out of communal feelings and that our moral circle expands as we become aware that we are members of additional communities. Ecology demonstrates to us that we are members of a quite interrelated and interdependent biotic community in addition to our various familial and social ones. Furthermore, we owe our most serious duties to fellow members of our most intimate communities such as family, with less serious duties owed to ecosystems. Callicott had originally favored a more thoroughly holistic version of this, but later emphasized the notion that obligations to less intimate communities do not replace those of more intimate communities. This is supported by a Humean approach to ethics in which duties grow out of our sentimental responses, and in particular out of community-oriented sentiments which tie us more closely to our more intimate relationships.

I suggested, though, that by de-emphasizing the holistic element of his work—done to avoid the problem of having to sometimes sacrifice individuals (even people) to better the ecosystem—Callicott's version of the Land Ethic is in danger of having lost its bite in terms of environmental protection. If we add Muir-like non-consumptive uses of nature as I have suggested, however, it might do better. On Callicott's expanding circle model, the biotic-community is the least intimate, and hence we owe the least to it. If, however, nature is tied to our very idea of who we are, it makes

it part of a much more intimate relationship, captured perhaps by Buber's notion of an I-Thou, as opposed to an I-It, relationship. This move is consistent with Callicott's reliance on Hume.

However, the promise of Callicott's theory, with my addition, as a way of accounting for both individualistic and holistic concerns cannot be fulfilled if its use of a Humean sentimentalism leads to relativism. I argued that this need not be the case. Importantly, though, my response to this problem does not rely on Hume's faulty solution of universal agreement regarding moral beliefs and values. Instead, in the end it relies on the belief that although there is a great amount of disagreement and conflict regarding important moral beliefs and values, there are enough common experiences to set certain limits as to acceptable alternatives. This too is consistent with a Humean approach because Hume sought to ground morality in our lived lives. This all leads up to a focused return to the topic of pluralism and environmental ethics in Chapter Five. I will argue that Callicott's Humean and Leopoldian approach to the environment, supplemented with Warren's substantive principles, is best interpreted as a pluralistic ethic which takes difference seriously while avoiding relativism.

CHAPTER 5

PLURALISM IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Introduction

In Chapters Two through Four I developed a broad environmental ethic, one that contains elements of both individualistic and holistic concerns, as any such ethic likely requires. This has been done consistent with the pluralism I argued for in Chapter One. In this chapter, I will more explicitly bring these two discussions together by arguing that Callicott's Humean and Leopoldian environmental ethic is, despite his claims to the contrary, best interpreted in pluralistic terms.

In the first chapter, I raised the problem of incompatibility between the individualism of animal welfarists and the holism of many environmentalists. I suggested that this problem arises from the intuition that both of these seemingly inconsistent outlooks are correct, and that it is a leading cause of continual disagreement regarding how to handle situations in which the welfare of individuals and wholes conflict. The case of non-indigenous mountain goats threatening local plant species and causing erosion in Washington's Olympic Mountains provides an example. Animal welfarists, concerned primarily with the welfare of individual animals, are in opposition to environmental holists' desire that the goats be destroyed to protect the integrity of the ecosystem. I suggested in that first chapter that pluralism might prove useful in rethinking the individualism–holism problem.

Pluralism, as I have outlined it, does not hold that every moral view is just as legitimate as any other; careful reason is needed to sort the more from the less correct

views. Attempting to do just this, I argued in Chapter Two that having interests is what makes individual entities morally considerable. Moral agency, autonomy, and life itself are not directly relevant to moral considerability, though being alive is a (contingently) necessary condition, and moral agency and autonomy are indicators of the possession of certain kinds of important interests. That interests identify individual organisms as morally considerable sets some limits to the range of legitimate beliefs and values regarding such entities.

Chapter Three explored Mary Anne Warren's principle-based approach to the individualism–holism problem. I argued for a revision of her results to cohere with the conclusions drawn in Chapter Two, suggesting one general principle for individuals and one for wholes, with more specific articulations arranged as sub-principles beneath these. I also argued that her principles are in need of an overarching explanatory theory (though not necessarily a monistic normative theory such as Kantianism or utilitarianism). Because she already relies on J. Baird Callicott's Humean approach to argue for the moral considerability of wholes, and because Callicott's environmental ethic (another important response to the individualism–holism problem) is in need of some substantive elements, the two could be merged to the advantage of both. This does, however, go against Warren's wish to bypass higher theoretical levels than that of principles. Her position seems to be that a principle-based approach can best manage the individualism–holism issue without appealing to pluralism and raising the related worry of relativism. However, a side effect of the conclusions reached in Chapters Two and Three is that Warren's justifications for ranking her principles are undermined. This should lead us to expect conflicts between principles with no direction as to how they should be resolved.

These first three chapters pave the way for the development of a pluralistic interpretation of Callicott's Humean approach to the individualism–holism problem, discussed in detail in Chapter Four and Five.

Chapter Four began with an exploration of Gifford Pinchot's and John Muir's competing views regarding our ethical relationship to our environment. Pinchot sees nature in terms of material resources to be managed and consumed for long-term human betterment. Rather than justifying a high degree of environmental protection, this approach encourages increased monoculture tree farms and fossil fuel exploration. In contrast to Pinchot's consumptive-use approach, Muir sees nature as God's (continuing) creation and as a place of emotional and spiritual growth. Nature should be protected from material consumption due to its connection with the divine and its role in the psychological betterment of human lives through non-consumptive uses. The deeply felt experiences in nature of the sort Muir describes are often what drive the environmentalist intuition that nature is intrinsically valuable (i.e., valuable independent of its usefulness to us). However, because the divine origin argument is likely to convince only certain theists of nature's value, it is Muir's non-consumptive uses relating to emotional and psychological betterment that will likely make the more persuasive case for environmental protection.

Described in the usual sense of non-consumptive *uses*, however, the benefits cited by Muir still fall short of justifying the level of protection desired by most environmentalists. Seeing nature in terms of uses, commonly conceived, treats it as an object to be managed in whatever way will most benefits those with a stake in it. This suggests that the various uses, both consumptive and non-consumptive, can be simply

weighted against one another to determine how to maximize benefits to us. There is no reason to suppose that aesthetic or psychological benefits will often win out over material interests. In fact, many things could presumably be altered or destroyed in ways objectionable to environmentalists without leading to a loss of overall benefit—even non-consumptive benefit—to humans. Most of us do not need to spend time in wilderness areas to appreciate nature's beauty or temporarily escape the trials of our all too urbanized lives. Even Thoreau, while praising nature for its awe and beauty inspiring qualities, thought some places too wild for human occupation.[1] Thinking about nature in terms of uses also leaves environmental protection susceptible to our whims; nature's value becomes dependent on which of our interests we as a culture happen to hold important at any given moment. Environmentalists seek a firmer foundation for environmental protection.

Another way of thinking about Muir's non-consumptive uses of nature is to recognize that for people who care deeply about the natural world, nature functions as elements of self-identity or understanding, not as "uses" in the usual sense. If healthy ecosystems are seen as part of our self-understanding—who we are or want to be—rather than as simply objects of our emotional or aesthetic reactions, it would be less likely that we would think of nature in terms of some sort of cost–benefit analysis simply weighing all the consumptive and non-consumptive uses against one another. This is not to say that nature is not useful, but rather that Muir's non-consumptive uses might be conceived as more tightly tied to deep interests which are qualitatively, or experientially, different from

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[1]See, for example, Thoreau's thoughts regarding his trip to Maine's Mt. Katahdin in: Henry David Thoreau, "The Maine Woods," *Henry David Thoreau* (New York: Library Classics of the United States; The Library of America, 1985), 645-46.

the usual way of thinking about uses. This redescription of at least some of the non-consumptive uses of nature (scientific or medicinal benefits might still be thought of primarily in terms of non-consumptive *uses*) not only fits with the Humean sentimentalist approach to environmental ethics articulated by Callicott, but it helps Callicott's project of justifying a high level of protection for nature because it pulls our environment closer to the core of our moral community. Finally, I spent some time in Chapter Four defending a Humean approach to ethics against the charge of relativism. I argued that it can survive such a challenge not by an appeal to an unlikely universalism of moral belief and value, but by a narrowing of the possible legitimate beliefs and values out of the diversity of views existing in the world. This is captured by the notion of moral pluralism.

Callicott's approach to the individualism–holism problem is intriguing because it claims to account for the intuition that both individuals and wholes are morally significant and suggests ways to balance or order these diverse concerns, while avoiding relativism. But in addition, he argues explicitly against pluralism, claiming that because his view offers a single metaphysics of morals, or an overarching explanatory framework, it is a monistic account capable of giving us single correct answers to particular moral problems. I will argue here that despite his unifying (Humean and Leopoldian) framework, Callicott's answer to the individualism–holism problem (with Warren-like principles providing a substantive element) remains pluralistic—it does not, for example, lead to single correct answers when the welfare of individual organisms and ecosystems come into conflict. Recognizing this might lead us to approach tough cases, such as Washington's mountain goats dilemma, in ways more congenial to satisfactory

resolutions. We might, for example, see compromise in such cases as a way to break the political deadlock while maintaining our moral integrity.

Monism and Pluralism in Environmental Ethics

Philosophers have long sought a unifying set of principles or an overarching theory by which to find single correct answers to every particular moral quandary. Although the awareness of diversity of beliefs and values in the world has pushed a few to embrace relativism instead, it has driven others to work even harder to find an ethical system by which to order all this difference. It is often assumed that these two options of relativism and ethical monism are the only two available. However, as Isaiah Berlin has argued, "there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathizing and deriving light from each other," and this does not entail that there is no objectivity to our diverging moral beliefs.[2] As argued previously, if Berlin is right, we have a third option—moral pluralism—which may allow us to accept both that competing beliefs and values (or systems of these) may be equally acceptable and that they are nonetheless open to critical evaluation. Disagreement is not always reducible to disagreements of reason, but not every view will be equally acceptable.[3] As Martin Benjamin says, "a number of good and important

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[2]Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 9. It should be noted that he describes the objectivity in stronger terms than would someone working within the Humean tradition. He says, for example, that we are not to "regard [our moral beliefs] simply as subjective, the products of creatures in different circumstances with different tastes from our own. . . . There is a world of objective values" (Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 9).

[3]One of the difficulties of describing or responding to various accounts of pluralism is distinguishing between the various things to which pluralism might apply: judgments of particular beliefs and values, principles, theories, concepts of the self in relation to others, notions of the Good, personal projects, or

ethical values and principles are inherently incompatible. They cannot be combined into a single harmonious scheme of morality for all."[4] He adds that conflicts will arise between these values "that are not due to selfishness, prejudice, ignorance, poor reasoning, and so on."[5] These conflicts are also not limited to disagreements between different people, but can arise within single persons as well, as when we are, to use another example from Berlin, conflicted regarding conflicts between the important, though often competing, values of freedom and equality.

One might think that given the diversity of views in the world and our desire to enact good environmental policy, it is simply in our best interest to approach the diversity of moral views with tolerance—to act *as if* pluralism were correct. We need not accept the actual legitimacy of more than one set of competing beliefs, but can continue to hold that our own view is in fact the single correct one. Some critics of the non-engagement of environmental philosophers with real-world problems would be happy with this approach, even as they think a successful monistic theory might someday be developed. Theory building is, after all, time consuming and perhaps even divisive in a world so

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even entire world views. That differences within some of these areas might be reducible to differences in others (for example, judgments of particulars beliefs or values to principles) further complicates an attempt to get a nice neat description of pluralism. Berlin's description of differences in how people value equality vs. freedom, for example, could be taken to refer to differences within world views (such as between people all within a protestant, liberal, capitalistic world view) or between world views (the one just described and a fundamentalist Moslem world view, for example). Pluralism is frequently described in terms of ethical theory. Neither Kantianism nor utilitarianism, for example, is seen to capture all of ethics but both reflect important, widely accepted ethical beliefs. A tension exists between an emphasis on consequences and respect for individuals which is, it is said, unresolvable by appeal only to reason. On my preferred description of pluralism, differences at any level of moral thinking amount to moral pluralism only in so far as they result in admitted (as opposed to unintended) rationally irreducible difference at the level of evaluations of particular cases (see Chapter One).

[4]Martin Benjamin, *Philosophy and This Actual World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 125.

[5]Ibid., 126.

diverse. An alternative is to see pluralism and tolerance as in order because, as Berlin thought, many of these views might actually be morally acceptable. In Chapter One, I described this as arising either from epistemological reasons (we do not know which view is better) or from ontological reasons (values such as mercy and justice, or freedom and equality, cannot be jointly maximized due to their inherent inconsistency). Our work in moral theory, especially if the second of these is true, ought to reflect this by moving away from the search for only monistic ethical theories—not simply for pragmatic reasons but because monism is philosophically problematic. Should we then dismiss monistic theories such as Callicott's out of hand?

Bryan Norton argues that the goal of environmental philosophy has been, up to now, the formulation of a monistic ethical theory. This has been true of both the individualistic human-centered and animal-welfarist camps on the one hand, and the holists on the other. On the environmentalist side of things, the result has been theoretical paralysis due to "false alternatives forced upon us by the assumption . . . that whatever the units of environmental value turn out to be, there will be only one kind of them."[6] In the meantime, we have practical issues which need to be addressed.

This could be taken as an argument for working harder to overcome the theoretical impasse to find some overarching unifying theory. Norton intends something different, however. He argues that moral monists tend to think of practical problems in terms of applying theory or principles to practical problems in order to churn out single correct answers. Evaluations of particular cases and policies are on hold awaiting a

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[6]Bryan Norton, "Integration or Reduction: Two Approaches to Environmental Values," *Environmental Pragmatism*, eds., Andrew Light and Eric Katz (New York: Routledge, 1996), 106.

univocal theory. In contrast to this approach, we should be "practical" philosophers. This alternative sees theoretical work to be a response to tough real-world problems. Theories are only tools, and they should be generated not from armchairs, but from practice. The advantage is clear—we do not have to wait for some final univocal theory before proceeding with policy.

Norton presents this as an argument against (theory-level) moral monism. But, the monist could reply that this says little, one way or the other, about monism *per se.* First, monism might be true even if we have not yet been able to articulate a single covering theory or set of principles that would give us more solid guidance in making correct evaluations. Anthony Weston argues against the hegemony of monism in environmental ethics by pointing out that the discipline is so young that we should not expect consensus on such things as the notion of intrinsic value.[7] However, it seems that this argument works just as well for the monist who wants to hold off on deciding whether pluralism is the way to go or not. Second, the monist might agree with Norton's view that the "applied" approach to doing moral theory is unlikely to work well. We ought instead to move back and forth between intuitions and judgments about particular cases, principles, and theory, refining each in light of the other in a reflective equilibrium approach. Evaluations of particular cases and policy need not wait for some finalized version of an overall theory. Advocates of monism can agree that environmental philosophy ought to be more connected with practical problems while maintaining a commitment to monism. So while it is good to keep in mind Norton's worries regarding

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[7]Anthony Weston, "Before Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Pragmatism*, eds., Andrew Light and Eric Katz (New York: Routledge, 1996), 151.

top-down approaches to ethics, an alternative line of reasoning is needed to make the case for environmental pluralism.

Callicott's Environmental Ethic as Monistic

In his development and defense of a Humean and Leopoldian response to the individualism–holism problem, Callicott makes what is probably the most thorough and explicit defense of monism in environmental philosophy. He believes that monism is the only way to avoid relativism while taking seriously the moral considerability of both individual people and animals and ecosystems.[8] He argues that a Humean interpretation of Leopold's Land Ethic (where "land" refers to all the parts of an ecosystem) taken as a monistic account, can do both of these things.

To motivate his particular environmental theory, Callicott first rejects both thoroughgoing holism and individualism. He quickly dismisses the former (a view he once held[9]) by agreeing with its detractors that evaluating human value and action solely in terms of impact on the environment would allow for grossly unacceptable results, such as killing humans to better the ecosystem.[10] He concludes that by itself holism

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[8]I agree with Callicott that we should try to avoid relativism, but it should be noted that some sorts of relativism might not be particularly objectionable (see: Susan Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism," *Ethics* 102 (1992): 785-98.). What I mean by relativism here is that not only are ethical beliefs and values relative to something (a culture or individuals), but that we have no way of non-arbitrarily choosing between better and worse views, or of criticizing views we otherwise find to be seriously flawed. Both monism and the pluralism I have described here seek to avoid relativism of this sort.

[9]See: J. Baird Callicott, "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic," *Companion to* A Sand County Almanac*: Interpretive and Critical Essays*, ed., J. Baird Callicott (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1987), 186-217.

[10]J. Baird Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 12.2 (1990): 103. And, J. Baird Callicott, "Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 19 (1994): 58.

unacceptably leaves little room for individual-oriented concerns. Callicott also rejects individualistic-only accounts. Tom Regan, well-known defender of animal rights, had argued that a rights-based environmental ethic might justify protection of nature to the high degree sought by most environmental theorists and activists. He asks rhetorically, "Were we to show proper respect for the rights of individuals who make up the biotic community, would not the *community* be preserved?"[11] Callicott agrees with Mark Sagoff that this is an empirical question the answer to which is surely negative: attempts to protect the rights of every individual would lead to the disruption of evolutionary and ecological processes, and environmental disaster.[12] Callicott adds, "To attempt to safeguard the rights of each and every individual member of an ecosystem would, correspondingly, be to attempt to stop practically all trophic processes beyond photosynthesis."[13]

Individualistic approaches, however, perhaps fair less badly than Callicott and Sagoff think, since actions leading to environmental disaster would certainly violate the rights of individuals. Nonetheless, as I argued earlier, even if we took seriously non-consumptive uses of nature, many things in the environment could be altered or destroyed with no overall loss of benefit to humans. Taking the interests of non-human animals into account and seeing nature as part of people's self-identity makes for a much stronger case for environmental protection. This too, though, falls short of the intuition of many

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[11]Quoted in J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," *The Animal Rights/Environmental Ethics Debate: The Environmental Perspective*, ed., Eugene C. Hargrove (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 251. Emphasis in original. For Regan's discussion, see: Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983), 361-63.

[12]Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," 251-52.

[13]Ibid., 251.

environmentalists that protection should come independent of any usefulness to us or any other interested beings.

Having rejected thorough-going holism and individualism, Callicott also rejects pluralistic accounts which try to solve the individualism–holism problem by allowing for both elements with no covering theory or unifying set of principles specifying how to balance or order them. Callicott's specific target is Christopher Stone's version of pluralism. Stone claims that "The Moral Pluralist holds that a . . . senator . . . might rightly embrace utilitarianism when it comes to legislating a rule for social conduct," yet rely on a non-consequentialist approach, "in arranging his personal affairs among kin or friends, or deciding whether it is right to poke out the eyes of pigeons."[14] Callicott's primary objection is that this requires a person to make much more radical shifts in belief than merely deciding which ethical theory is appropriate for which case. Embracing utilitarianism or Kantianism means also accepting certain commitments regarding notions of the Good, conceptions of the self, criteria for moral considerability, the importance and role of reason, and a moral psychology, thereby making pluralism a sort of "metaphysical musical chairs."[15] It requires a person to either simultaneously hold mutually contradictory moral philosophies (metaphysical, meta-ethical, normative, etc., views) or to move from one to another of these philosophical positions "with the same ease of changing clothes."[16]

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[14]Quoted in: Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," 104. Originally from: Christopher D. Stone, *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 118.

[15]Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," 115. And, J. Baird Callicott, "Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended," 52.

[16]Callicott, "Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended," 52.

Not only do we end up with schizophrenic inner lives with Stone's pluralism, but we are left with no decision making procedure if upon trying out different approaches to particular cases we get inconsistent or contradictory indications regarding what we ought to do. Stone has provided no way of deciding when to use which overall approach because he has provided us with no covering theory or set of ordered principles. Callicott is right that this is problematic. In particular, it is hard to imagine anyone being able to hold more than one such large set of beliefs at one time, much less being able to move between such sets as needed. We might also worry about the maintenance of ethical integrity under a system requiring us to quickly shed one set of convictions in favor of another. This suggests that any acceptable pluralism will have to take a more subtle approach. Stone's response to the problem of not knowing when to use one and when another overarching approach is to appeal to our intuitions, cultivated moral beliefs, and sensibilities to buy into world views in which values, duties, and the like, are ordered in a particular way. But, Callicott complains, we are left with either no real way to choose between competing sets of beliefs and values because we have no covering theory, or, if we *can* be more precise with respect to our worldviews used to sort out the conflicting claims, we would no longer in need of pluralism.[17]

We could argue for a more charitable reading of Stone in which cognitive and evaluative shifts are not of the magnitude Callicott sees necessary for Stone's project. To say that in some cases a more utilitarian-type approach is called for, and in others a more significant focus on individual dignity or integrity, need not mean that we must embrace

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[17]Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," 112-13. For Stone's original description, see especially: Christopher D. Stone, *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism*, 241-58.

at one moment the entirety of Bentham or Mill's metaphysics of morals and in others all of Kant's. Rather, we might recognize that each of these traditional theories is incomplete, or even that although they capture something important about moral evaluation, they are each wrong in some important ways. So for example, when voting for a tax cut or for more money to fund education one might think that considerations of consequences are the best way to make the choice. Others may agree in general but feel a special obligation to particular individuals, such as their children, and argue for an alternative approach. Both might be equally morally acceptable. A person trying to decide how best to make a decision need not be trying to decide between two completely different notions of the Good, moral psychology, a sense of self, or beliefs regarding who is morally considerable because they may not be comparing thorough-going utilitarianism with thorough-going Kantianism (or some other approach). Rather, they may simply be wondering when obligations to those close to them should take precedence over impersonal duties to others, when the interests protected by rights must give way to making more people happier, or, in other situations, when mercy should be extended despite good reasons to extract retributive justice. It is not clear to me why such conflicts (whether inter or intra-personal) entail shifts in belief of the magnitude Stone seems comfortable expecting.

This is to suggest neither that there must be some covering theory which says exactly when to use which approach or when to emphasize which values, nor that flipping a coin is an acceptable way to decide. Rather, as we each (in concert with others of our social communities, of course) seek to develop coherent sets of beliefs and values, many inconsistencies will likely remain—for both epistemological and ontological reasons. As

offered, however, Stone's version of pluralism is problematic. The more charitable reading (perhaps no longer recognizably Stone) suggests the possibility of a more subtle version of pluralism not so susceptible to Callicott's "musical chairs" complaint.

Having dismissed straightforward individualism and holism, as well as pluralism seeking to allow for both, Callicott offers a *monistic* theory to solve the individualism–holism problem. His approach is to provide a unifying framework organizing duties and obligations to both individuals (humans as well as animals) and ecosystems which will also avoid the problem of relativism, the main worry attached to any pluralistic approach. His own approach, which he calls "communitarianism," relies on an awareness that we live within a "multiplicity of moral spheres—family obligations, the duties associated with our professional lives, our public lives, our interspecies, and ecosystemic and biospheric relationships—each with its very different set of demands that often compete, one with another."[18] This should not, he argues, suggest pluralism: despite these conflicting pulls, "we must maintain a coherent sense of self and world, a unified moral world view . . . [which] enables us rationally to select among or balance out the contradictory or inconsistent demands . . ."[19] I agree with Callicott that coherence in our moral thinking is an important goal; I disagree on the extent to which this is possible.

As described in the previous chapters, Callicott builds on both Hume's and Leopold's work. Leopold had argued that the insights of ecology and evolutionary theory—in particular the notion that all living things are interconnected and interdependent—ought to push us to expand our moral thinking beyond the communities

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[18]Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," 120-21.

[19]Ibid., 121.

of individual humans and animals to include even ecosystems. He begins the concluding chapter, entitled "The Land Ethic,"of *The Sand County Almanac* by describing his version of an expanding ethical circle. Ethics, he says, are "a kind of community instinct in-the-making" in which competition gives way to cooperation.[20] As with other expanding ethical circle models, Leopold sees human moral development as the gradual awareness that we belong to larger and larger communities of interacting members, which, in turn, leads to the inclusion of greater numbers and sorts of morally relevant beings in our moral community.

Peter Singer's work on the ethical treatment of animals is a more recent use of the notion of an expanding ethical circle. Although he avoids talking in terms of intrinsic value, Singer argues that some animals show evidence of being as capable of suffering as are most people. Because it is this ability that makes people morally considerable, it would be "speciesist" to not extend considerability to sentient nonhuman animals.[21] Not only is this move persuasive, but it has the advantage of isolating a specific moral-considerability conferring property. It looks, however, as though this line of reasoning cannot be extended to cover the sorts of things Leopold has in mind. At most it can establish some degree of moral considerability for "higher" animals; neither non-sentient individual organisms nor ecosystems are open to being harmed or bettered in the morally relevant sense. Any protection of ecosystems would be derivative upon individual interests. Many contemporary environmentalists support Leopold's move beyond the

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[20]Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1987), 203.

[21]Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* rev. ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 6.

individualism of Singer, but ascribing moral considerability to wholes must involve a different way of expanding our moral circle. For Callicott, the answer lies in a Humean interpretation of Leopold's Land Ethic.

Leopold's expanding moral circle depends on the belief that the science of ecology demonstrates that our (pre-moral) community includes much more than just other humans. His favorite ecological metaphor is that of a "land pyramid" in which matter and energy move up and down a layered pyramid organized according to who eats whom. Top carnivores are represented by the apex, humans by a larger layer one step down also encompassing bears and raccoons, and insects and plants by yet lower levels.[22] Not only does this demonstrate for him that all of nature is interdependent, but also that humans are "plain members" of the land community.[23] The implications for human action is clear: if we want to continue living fruitful lives, we cannot continue to destroy the other parts of the interconnected unity. Consumption cannot be our sole guiding concern when it comes to our relationships with the rest of the world—such would be self-defeating.

At this point, Leopold's argument sounds strictly prudential; he does not, however, want it to remain so. He knows that conservation programs built around the goal of reaping economic benefits have historically not succeeded. The traditional view of humans as "conquerors" of their environment is doomed to fail because it assumes that we know "just what makes the community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless, in community life," when we clearly do not.[24] We need,

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[22]Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 215.

[23]Ibid., 204.

[24]Ibid., 204.

Leopold thinks, to internalize a sense of right and wrong that goes beyond such prudential reasoning if there is to be any hope that people will act in any thoughtful and significant way to protect non-human nature. The awareness of our interconnection with, and interdependence on, the rest of the land pyramid must lead not only to attempts to avoid something like a bio-systems crash, but to a love and devotion which will establish duties to a morally considerable natural world.

Leopold's move beyond the prudential, or instrumentalist, approach to nature involves seeing the interconnectedness of all things and the practical implications of this for our well-being as pushing us to think of nature as itself morally considerable. In Leopold's words, the Land Ethic "changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it [and] . . . implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."[25] Callicott takes this as indicating both individualistic and a holistic notions of moral standing. The problem, though, is that it is not at all clear how we can make the move from a purely descriptive account of being in complex ecosystemic relationships to thinking that the ecosystem and its constituent parts are morally considerable. With Singer we might see lab rats or dairy cows as having value independent of any usefulness to us; he has provided us with a specific criterion—sentience—by which to expand our moral community to include them. Leopold has not done this for ecosystems.

Callicott argues that we should interpret Leopold not as looking for specific characteristics *in things* (such as sentience) as indicating moral considerability, but rather we should look to see what sorts of relationships we have with respect to various things.

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[25]Ibid., 196.

He turns to Hume to provide the theoretical resources. Hume had argued that the foundations of morality are to be found in our sentimental reactions. Our powers of reason "discover truths: But where the truths which they discover are indifferent, and beget no desire or aversion, they can have no influence on conduct and behaviour. What is honourable, what is fair, what is becoming, what is noble, what is generous, takes possession of the heart, and animates us to embrace and maintain it."[26] Sentimental reactions provide the motivational element that sets moral thinking apart from purely means–ends thinking. Furthermore, it is in relationships that we have the relevant sentiments necessary for ethics.[27]

A couple of clarifying points are in order. First, not all sentimental reactions are moral in character; or more precisely, are of the sort that provide the foundation for moral thinking. Moral sentiments involve an attraction or repulsion to things. Further, they can be distinguished from ambition, vanity, and other self-directed concerns in that, "The notion of morals, implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it."[28] Unlike the case of thinking, for example, of another person as one's enemy, moral claims are meant to be the sort of thing everyone can agree upon, regardless of how remote one is from the situation. Self-concerned sentiments will be different for each person according to one's circumstances.[29]

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[26]David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed., J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett P, 1983), 15.

[27]Ibid., 26.

[28]Ibid., 74-75.

[29]Ibid., 75.

Relatedly, Hume argues that we are in fact, at least partially, other-oriented: it "cannot be disputed, that there is some benevolence, however small, infused into our bosom; some spark of friendship for human kind."[30] Our experience demonstrates this, and attempting to recast such sentiments in egoistic terms requires, he suitably says, "the highest stretch of philosophy."[31]

Lastly, the role reason plays for Hume in making moral judgments cannot be under estimated. Hume thinks reason will enter all of our moral evaluations—it alone can show us the relation between actions and their consequences.[32] Further, before fixing on the "proper sentiment," we must think carefully to make comparisons, examine complex relationships, and discover the relevant facts of the matter.[33] All this depends upon reason. It also pushes us, according to Hume, to gradually enlarge our sense of whom things such as justice applies to, thereby foreshadowing Leopold's conception of an expanding ethical circle.[34] Sentiment plays the central role in his theory in part because he is responding to the traditional view of ethics in which the passions are seen as the enemy of morality, and in part because he believes (rightly, I think) that "Reason, being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action."[35] But for Hume, ethics is not identical to our moral sentiments. Moral judgments are informed by both sentiment and

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[30]Ibid., 74.

[31]Ibid., 90.

[32]Ibid., 82.

[33]Ibid., 15.

[34]Ibid., 26.

[35]Ibid., 88. (Elsewhere he claims that reason alone cannot account for ultimate ends, as can be seen from the absurdity of answering the question why one hates pain and loves pleasure. Same text, p. 87.)

reason, with sentiment playing the foundational role making certain judgments ethical judgments as opposed to, for example, prudential ones.

For Callicott, the set of the various nested social circles has gradually expanded throughout humanity's history. It does so not as an expanding balloon, as he has characterized Singer's model, where our moral thinking changes only in terms of the number and type of organisms whose interests are to count (the criterion for moral considerability remaining the same), but like the rings of a tree, with each inner set of relationships and their corresponding duties remaining intact as new ones are added.[36] The one exception is that newer, or more outer circle obligations limit the ways in which we can fulfill the more inner circle duties. Obligations to ecosystems, for example, limit how we can provide food for ourselves and families. As already mentioned, by leaving intact more inner circles as we add new ones, Callicott hopes to avoid the charge of "eco-fascism," in which holism allows for (or even requires) what would otherwise be immoral acts against individuals in the name of ecosystems. He wants this to be both individualistic and holistic.

What holds all this together for Callicott is the notion that although the duties and obligations of the various relationships can conflict, they are expressible in a common Humean vocabulary and are thus not incommensurable: "[The] common denominator is the community concept," in which moral considerability, duties, etc., are grounded in the moral sentiments of altruism, love, sympathy, and the like, for fellow individuals. For the community itself, they are grounded in respect, loyalty, patriotism, and a sense of group

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[36]Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," 122-23.

pride.[37] Because conflicts between duties of different relationships can be expressed in a common language, they are, apparently, resolvable. The informing role played by reason is critical for Callicott because it provides the connection sought by Leopold between ecology and morality. Our moral circle can expand to include holistic entities such as ecosystems once we allow the lessons of biology, evolutionary theory, and ecology to impact our moral sentiments—to make us see that we are members of this larger, interdependent community.

The notion that the communities or relationships provide the common denominator to all our moral duties, whether to individuals or to ecosystems, provides Callicott with his final response against those calling for pluralism as the answer to the individualism–holism problem. He argues that his view is thoroughly monistic because it offers "one concept of the nature of morality (as rooted in moral sentiments), one concept of human nature (that we are social animals . . . with fellow creatures . . . of evolution), [and] one moral psychology (that we respond in subtly shaded ways to the fellow members of our multiple, diverse, tiered communities and to those communities *per se*)."[38] It provides, in essence, a single moral philosophy or a metaphysics of morals. There is no need to follow Stone's suggestion that we accept utilitarianism in one case and Kantianism in another, or individualism in one and holism in another, thereby making shifts of entire belief and value systems. Callicott thinks his own view nevertheless allows for "a multiplicity of hierarchically ordered and variously 'textured'

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[37]Callicott, "Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended," 55.

[38]Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," 123-24.

moral relationships" corresponding to our various nested social circles.[39] It is thus billed as a monistic theory that can account for both individualistic and holistic concerns.

Callicott's Environmental Ethic as Pluralistic

I find Callicott's use of Leopold and Hume intriguing. It suggests a way to solve the individualism–holism problem without resorting to Stone's unlikely solution of applying different sorts of mutually inconsistent theories to different situations. He has also given us a possible way of avoiding relativism. Contrary to Callicott, however, I think that Callicott's system should be redescribed in pluralistic terms. I do not wish to question Callicott's general Humean approach that moral values and duties, etc., are grounded in sentiment and that this can give us nested relationships of various types and strengths of obligation. Further, I agree with Callicott that a Humean account can avoid relativism; I disagree, though, with how this can be done.

Callicott had argued that his Humean account is monistic, and that it avoids relativism because, as Hume claimed, the relevant sentiments are universal: "That which renders morality an active principle, and constitutes virtue our happiness, and vice our misery . . . nature has made universal in the whole species."[40] Callicott suggests that evolutionary science provides an explanation: the moral sentiments are fixed in human nature through natural selection.[41] Family units were more successful if their members

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[39]Ibid., 123.

[40]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 15. Elsewhere he claims that "No man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others." Same text, p. 74 ftnt.

[41]Callicott, "Hume's Is/Ought Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic," *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1989), 121.

were naturally altruistic. As larger groups developed, the benefits of altruistic feelings and actions were passed down socially, helping them to succeed also. However, while very general sentimental responses to others and their actions are probably shared among all (or most) people, the vast variety of beliefs and values, and indeed whole systems of thought in which these are embedded, argues against a very wide universalism. One need not be a pluralist to recognize that other than a few very general moral beliefs and values, great diversity exists. And as Rawls points out, diversity which is "conflicting and irreconcilable" is "a permanent feature" of our world.[42] As I argued earlier, this is true for both epistemological and ontological reasons, and holds both between and within single persons. Hume's answer to the charge of relativism is therefore closed off.

This should not force us to give up Hume's account (and hence Callicott's), however, on grounds that he places sentiment at the center of ethical understanding and is therefore a subjectivist leading us in the direction of radical relativism. As already discussed, Hume thinks that "it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection."[43] We may, for instance, initially have negative sentimental reactions, and hence negative moral beliefs, regarding people of different races or cultures, which are alterable by reason—through the discovery that all people share the same morally relevant criteria—directing us to feel and think that all people should be treated with equal respect. In fact, despite Callicott's complaint that Singer over-rationalizes ethics,[44] this is

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[42]John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia U P, 1993), 36.

[43]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 15.

[44]See for example: Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," 255-56.

how Singer's expanding ethical circle can be made to fit a Humean account as well. Reason shows us that, despite what many think, many nonhuman animals share morally relevant characteristics with us; this ought to impact our moral judgment. Hume had argued that whenever we are in doubt as to the proper sentimental response to something, we must suspend sentiment until reason can be used to sort things out.[45] If we are confronted with a new and strange social practice—such as James Rachel's example of Eskimos once sending their elderly out on the snow to die—we should think carefully about why such things are done before we settle on a particular sentimental response and moral judgment. Rachels, in this case, suggests that a severe lack of resources, and not a general disregard for human life, explains this Eskimo practice.[46] Such an awareness would surely impact our sentimental reactions, and hence moral judgments. Callicott recognizes the central role of reason in Hume and follows him in thinking that this leads to unique agreed upon answers to moral questions. However, as I have been suggesting, much difference remains despite our rational abilities. Reason can result in difference not rationally reducible, but it also allows us to criticize other views and look for common or overlapping ground.

On this line of thought, Susan Wolf points out that believing that there is no one right set of answers to moral questions is not to have to admit that no answers are better than others; some may be simply wrong. Reason and empirical facts "can constrain judgment even if it does not dictate a single objectively best answer."[47] If one thinks,

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[45]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 85.

[46]James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1999) 21 and 28.

[47]Susan Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism," *Ethics* 102 (1992): 791.

with Berlin and Rawls, that at least some of this difference in views is "a diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines . . . [which] reasonable citizens affirm,"[48] and that all people share some important experiences and reactions, then there is hope for being able to evaluate different beliefs and values as being better or worse as opposed to picking the one right answer and seeing the rest as the result of ignorance, selfishness, outdated dogma, or whatever.

Callicott's Humean "communitarianism" leaves the door open for pluralism in another way. As mentioned, Callicott sees his work as monistic at the level of moral philosophy, or "metaphysics of morals," in contrast to "lower" theoretical levels of theories, principles, or particular judgments. He does not claim to be offering a covering theory under which to order utilitarianism, Kantianism, care ethics, and the like, but rather an account of the nature of morality, a concept of human nature, and a moral psychology. Stone's shifting allegiances problem disappears because the various competing and mutually inconsistent theories and their supporting moral philosophies are replaced by a single unifying account.[49] The community model replaces, for example, the individualistic and atomistic assumptions of utilitarianism and the primacy of reason found in Kant's moral theory. So, Callicott thinks, his own account is monistic at a rather "high" level and at the same time does away with the need for Stone's cobbling together of various moral theories.

Hume, however, had not denied the need, or at least left room, for the systematization of our judgments in sets of principles or normative theories in order to aid

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[48]Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 36.

[49]Callicott, "The Case Against Moral Pluralism," 123.

us in forming the correct moral sentiments. In fact, sentiments themselves are not ethics—they are what make certain judgments (guided and informed by reason) ethical. Ethics is, at minimum, a systematized set of beliefs and values which enable and guide us in making evaluations of particular cases. Actions are deemed right or wrong according to our culturally developed understandings of moral concepts. The room for work on theories and principles is made once again by Hume's emphasis on reason's role in the formation and guidance of moral sentiments, and hence judgments. Sentiment alone would certainly not lead us to any coherent or consistent set of responses to all of the various relationships and situations we find ourselves in. In fact, sentiments alone are likely to lead to extreme diversity. Even within our own minds we have very different reactions to people and events from day to day, depending largely on our moods and attitudes. Reason, although underdetermining the results of comparisons and evaluations of competing views, nevertheless constricts the options, in part by helping us to organize our moral thinking into principles, theories, and the like. It may be possible to make room in a Humean account for both consequentialist and rights-based concerns, for example. In fact, these different moral emphases might be made part of some of Callicott's nested social circles. In any case, a Humean approach starts with sentiments and reasoning in the context of lived lives. That there are different sources of value, different ways of arranging our experiences, inconsistencies between important beliefs and values, would be expected in a world as richly complex as ours. But, presumably, we want to develop as coherent an account of all this as we can, which is why theory building is so important, whether done by philosophers or (perhaps implicitly) by society at large.

Hume said almost nothing about theory building of this sort because he was

concerned instead with the question of the origin of ethics. Providing an answer to the origin question is providing a meta-theoretical view regarding the nature of morality. The issue of monism or pluralism remains, contra Callicott, at the level of moral theory and principles, in part because work must be done at these levels to systematize the substantive elements of even a Humean approach to ethics. In fact, in his constant imploring of us to consider the utility, happiness, and satisfaction of ourselves and others in evaluating our sentimental reactions, it appears that Hume himself favors what would later emerge as utilitarianism. At one point he in fact sounds very much like a rule-utilitarian in his defense of rules of justice: "But the benefit, resulting from them, is not the consequence of every individual single act; but arises from the whole scheme or system, concurred in by the whole, or the greater part of the society."[50] This is not the whole of morality, however, as our sentiments and reason regarding other persons push many of us also to embrace a theory of rights not reducible to utilitarian concerns. There is room, then, in a Humean account of ethics for the sorts of theory building Callicott appears to think his system makes obsolete, as well as plenty of room for rationally irreducible disagreement.

One reason Callicott might think his community model provides us with a monistic ethic is that he does not say much about how it is to guide our decisions regarding particular cases. Consider again the case of non-indigenous mountain goats harming plants and causing soil erosion in Washington's Olympic Mountains. In this case people have long remained divided as to whether to protect the goats or the ecosystem. Callicott's concentric circle model by itself says nothing about how we

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[50]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 94.

should decide such a case. We are not, after all, simply to exhaust our obligations to those of the more inner circles before responding to the wants and needs of those further "out." Exactly how are obligations, both within and between various communities related?

As discussed in Chapter Four, Callicott does provide at least one bit of direction, in the form of two second order principles (SOP's) for ordering our moral obligations:

SOP1: "Obligations generated by membership in more venerable and intimate communities take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities."

SOP2: "Stronger interests (for lack of a better word) generate duties that take precedence over duties generated by weaker interests."[51]

These provide some guidance, but as far as our more basic moral principles are concerned, he says little except that as we add circles, our moral relationships and duties to preexisting communities remain unchanged (though the means of fulfilling preexisting duties are limited by new ones).

Because her principles cover both individualistic and holistic concerns, Mary Anne Warren's principles can provide a needed substantive element to Callicott's otherwise more abstract framework. I had argued in Chapter Three for a revision of some of Warren's principles such that a general "Protection of Interests" principle captured the notion that it is individual's interests that are most relevant to their moral standing, and a holistic principle captured the notion that ecosystems and species are important

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[51]Callicott, "Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism," *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1999), 73.

independent of their usefulness to us. Under the former can be placed all of W. D. Ross's principles, interpreted to make reference to not only humans but to all interested creatures. Even adding Warren's principles, however, does not lead to monism. After all, any justification for ranking her principles to better guarantee single correct answers to moral quandaries was lost with my argument that interests alone provide moral considerability—the relative importance of other possible sources of moral considerability (such as life and autonomy) had provided for her the main basis for ranking. There remains no obvious nonarbitrary way of ordering either the more general principles or the more specific principles subsumed beneath these (such as Ross's duties of fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, etc.). Furthermore, because Callicott's SOP 1 is to be considered as a prima facie principle only, with SOP 2 cutting across it, we cannot even assume that SOP 1 and 2 provide the sort of moral guidance that would result in single correct answers. Callicott and Warren have provided a useful way to think about our obligations to nonhuman individuals and wholes, but one that is more amenable to pluralism than monism.

Concluding Thoughts

It may turn out that moral monism is the correct way to think about ethics—it remains possible that we have simply not yet found a single theory or set of principles by which to order all of our moral beliefs and values. Work done by Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, Martin Benjamin, and Susan Wolf, among others, however, suggests that not only does irreducible difference of views in fact exist, but that many of these diverse views are correct—that is, moral pluralism is correct. Importantly, this does not mean that we are

unable to criticize views we find objectionable. Although there are probably few universal moral beliefs, the range of legitimate views is limited at least in part by our common experience of living human lives. We all, for example, suffer when certain things are done to us, making moral systems that allow or enforce torture or arbitrary imprisonment, gender inequality, and racial segregation grossly unacceptable. Nevertheless, much difference regarding moral beliefs and values exists. In Benjamin's words, some of the difference between, "good and important ethical values and principles" is due to the fact that they "are inherently incompatible."[52] Some is also due to our limited understanding of our complex world and social interactions. The dispute between consequentialist and deontological concerns, for instance, is due at least in part to the incompatibility and incommensurability of the relative notions of the good and the right—yet many of us think both approaches capture something important about ethics. I have suggested that Callicott's Humean framework might allow for this.

But Callicott's Humean framework was intended primarily to deal with another problem: how to be holistic with respect to the environment and yet individualistic with respect to organisms. Making ecosystemic value depend solely on the interests of individuals fails to justify the level of protection sought by environmentalists as well as their strong intuition that nature should be protected independent of its usefulness to us. From the other direction, making value for individuals derivative on ecosystems leaves organisms susceptible to being sacrificed for the good of the whole. Callicott's answer to this individualism–holism problem relies on the notion that ethics—including who or what has moral standing—depends upon our sentimental reactions, informed by reason.

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[52]Benjamin, *Philosophy and This Actual World*, 125.

A sense of community is one of the key forces pushing us to think ethically about others. It leads us to think empathetically about other individuals and holistically about the group. Ecology and environmental science make us aware that we are members not only of human social communities, but of a highly interdependent bio-systemic community as well. Because we have deeper connections with those with whom we are in more intimate relationships, our duties to them are strongest. Duties to ecosystems are, on this view, weaker than those to families—consistent with commonsense morality.

I have argued that despite Callicott's claim that because he has provided a single overarching framework—what he calls a metaphysics of morals—his work should be redescribed in pluralistic terms. It appears that rationally irreducible difference remains at the levels of normative theory, principles (even with Warren's principles included), and most importantly, evaluations of particular cases. This does not mean that every view is just as good as any other—some things will be cleared up as we work hard to make our ethics more coherent. That interests, as opposed to being alive or autonomous, are what make individual organisms morally considerable is an example of how philosophers might narrow the range of acceptable views. Cases like that of the mountain goats in Washington, however, remain difficult. We can eliminate the less good answers by thinking them through on the Callicott/Warren model, but no obviously correct answer emerges in the end. Killing the goats when a viable sterilization program is available would be unacceptable, as would constructing some sort of painful trap. Sometimes, though, as in this case, none of the real options are clear favorites, and Callicott's view does not provide a way to decide. Although the trivial-to-vital interests continuum helps in clear cases, here the welfare of the animals and of the ecosystem are both vital.

Thinking about the intimacy of the various communities involved also fails to clear things up, as the goats are part of the very ecosystemic community in question.

This may leave us unsatisfied with the Callicott/Warren approach. But, no alternative theory exists which gets us further, as they tend to be either thoroughgoing individualistic or holistic theories problematic for the reasons already cited. By merging Hume's and Leopold's work, Callicott has provided a framework for understanding how we can have both without reducing one to the other. Because individualistic and holistic concerns are not reducible, however, rationally irreducible difference will remain in cases where these different concerns conflict.

The assumption of monism is that we can develop unifying theories or ordered sets of principles to arrive at single correct answers to particular moral quandaries. This may lead to pessimism when there are no obvious solutions to cases pitting individualistic and holistic concerns against one another. The inability of both Warren and Callicott to address the individualism–holism problem in a way that generates single correct answers would, from a monistic perspective, make their work uninviting. Pluralism, by avoiding the absolutist assumptions of monism, may lead to more optimism in the face of difficult cases. It can provide a way out of political deadlocks like the mountain goat case, which has been unresolved for decades, by helping us see that alternative viewpoints might be roughly equal in legitimacy to our own. Because of this, in terms of policy making, pluralism argues for consensus building and compromise; in terms of philosophical inquiry, it argues against insisting on a single overarching or unifying normative theory. By seeing the opposing side as plausibly correct, we might be more willing to find compromises, though even this will not always be available. It also suggests that those

who wish to embrace a pragmatic, or non-theoretical pluralism in order to better make progress on environmental problems can make the stronger claim that theoretical pluralism undergirds their political efforts.

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