

Beyond Anthropocentrism

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After the first wave of writings in environmental philosophy in the early 1970s, which were mostly critical of anthropocentrism, a new trend emerged which sought to humanise this subject, and to revive or vindicate anthropocentric stances. Only in this way, it was held, could environmental values become human values, and ecological movements manage to become social ecology. Later writers have detected tacit anthropocentrism lurking even in Deep Ecology, or have defended ‘perspectival anthropocentrism’, as the inevitable methodology of any system of environmental ethics devised by and for the guidance of human beings. Human good, broadly enough conceptualised, is held to be the basis of ethics. Besides, it is sometimes added, non-anthropocentric considerations in any case add nothing to anthropocentric ones, when broadly construed.

It is here replied that these revisionary approaches often elide crucial distinctions, and in denying the relevance of nonhuman goods unintentionally narrow the range of human sympathies, and deprive human agents of some of the grounds for environmental concern, as well as of key elements of the basis for preserving ecological systems. Even approaches which allow ‘the human scale of values’ to range beyond human interests are prone to impose limitations on what humans are capable of valuing that are unduly stringent; we need to be free to preserve possibilities for life beyond human life, and not only forms of life meaningful to humans.

1. The Anthropocentric Reaction

The first generation of environmental philosophers of the early 1970s sought to take ethics and its presuppositions beyond anthropocentrism, and I will be arguing that they were right to do so. Of these founding fathers, Holmes Rolston, whose presentation initiated this series of lectures, has later come to be known as the father of Environmental Philosophy. Others included the late Richard Routley, who changed his name to Sylvan, and who published the

first paper in the field,¹ and Arne Naess (who died quite recently), one of the founders of Deep Ecology. But I am not endorsing Deep Ecology, or Rolston's ethical holism, or Sylvan's rejection of Western traditions, but rather their shared view that anthropocentrism is an insufficient and misguided basis for normative ethics.

As for anthropocentrism, what was usually meant, and what I shall mean by the phrase in this essay, is the belief that nothing but human beings has moral standing, or should be taken into account in ethical deliberations; this belief is also sometimes known as 'normative anthropocentrism'. They did not mean the belief that human interests may be ethically central but are not the only ethically relevant considerations (although the term is sometimes used as loosely as this); and nor shall I. And they did not usually have in mind teleological or metaphysical anthropocentrism, the belief that everything exists for the sake of human beings, although this belief was discussed in the first monograph in the field, John Passmore's *Man's Responsibility for Nature*,² and is sometimes presented as a ground for adherence to normative anthropocentrism. In urging people to look beyond human interests, this first wave of theorists wanted to stress that not doing so reflected human arrogance, that nature or (more cogently) some segments of nature has or have independent interests that matter, that failure to recognise this can distort and misrepresent our own humanity, and that in any case concern to avert nonhuman suffering cannot consistently be grounded on an anthropocentric basis.

However, the second wave of environmental philosophers often adopted a different approach, and often a more humanistic one. Bryan Norton, for example, argued that there was no need to associate anthropocentrism with shallow rather than deeper environmentalism, concerned with the distant future and with the preservation of other species and their habitats, for human interests are sufficient to underpin the case for preservation, and the interests of the human future call for a long-term approach to nature independently

¹ Richard Routley (later Sylvan), 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?', *Proceedings of the World Congress of Philosophy* (Varna, Bulgaria: World Congress of Philosophy, 1973), 205–210. The earliest paper of Holmes Rolston III was his 'Is There an Ecological Ethic', *Ethics*, **85** (1975), 93–109. The earliest relevant paper of Arne Naess was his 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement: A Summary', *Inquiry*, **16** (1973), 95–100.

² John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974).

of appeal to non-human interests. Certainly if human interests are confined to human preferences, as in what he called 'strong anthropocentrism', not enough preservation will be justified, but this deficiency will be made good (he believes) if instead we adopt 'weak anthropocentrism', and concern ourselves with rational human preferences and thus with human interests much more broadly conceptualised.³ As we shall see, different versions of this broad approach to human interests have been developed by others, with considerable cogency.

One such philosopher is Janna Thompson, who suggests that natural entities are valuable because they enhance our lives, either through our living in harmony with nature, or through our appreciation of natural processes for what they are.⁴ At the same time Thompson berates what she calls 'environmental ethics' for locating intrinsic value in non-sentient creatures, suggesting that those who do so cannot consistently stop short of locating it in machines or in rocks as well; the paper in which she does so is entitled 'A Refutation of Environmental Ethics'. Clearly Thompson does not regard philosophers who are either anthropocentrists or sentientists (people such as Peter Singer and such as herself who restrict moral standing to sentient creatures only) as environmental ethicists at all. But most people have sensibly ignored this implicit terminological suggestion, and have included among environmental ethicists those arguing in environmental contexts for any of the possible range of normative stances concerning moral standing (including that of Thompson herself).

As for Thompson's substantive claim, there is a good reply in Kenneth Goodpaster's point (made in 1978) that it makes no sense to ascribe moral standing to things that lack a good of their own, such as rocks and machines, since they cannot be harmed or benefited (as opposed to merely being damaged or reconstructed), but that it makes much better sense to ascribe it to living organisms, since these really do have a good of their own, can be healthy or unhealthy, and can be harmed or benefited accordingly.⁵ So Thompson's

³ Bryan Norton, 'Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism', *Environmental Ethics*, 6 (1984), 131–148; Bryan Norton, 'Why I am Not a Non-Anthropocentrist: Callicott and the Failure of Monistic Inherentism', *Environmental Ethics*, 17 (1995), 341–358.

⁴ Janna Thompson, 'A Refutation of Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics*, 12 (1990), 147–160.

⁵ Kenneth E. Goodpaster, 'On Being Morally Considerable', *Journal of Philosophy*, 75 (1978), 308–325.

argument for the necessity of stopping short at sentientism miscarries, as would any attempt on the part of anthropocentrists to borrow it to suggest that non-anthropocentrists have no basis for denying moral standing to anything. However, it should be remarked that although she could be construed as criticising the normative stances of the first wave of environmental ethicists, she was not seeking to defend anthropocentrism, as opposed to sentientism. Many others, however, have explicitly espoused anthropocentrism. Thus Peter Carruthers writes: 'For we ought to be able to see clearly that it is only the sufferings of humans that have moral standing',⁶ while parallel stances have been taken in the field of animal ethics by R.G. Frey⁷ and by Michael Leahy.⁸ Besides Norton, other environmental philosophers have adopted recognisable variants of his weak anthropocentrism, including Eugene C. Hargrove⁹ and Mark Sagoff.¹⁰

Before I turn to further forms of anthropocentrism that can be construed as developing Norton's appeal to broad human interests, a moment should be spent on a different basis which some regard as supportive of anthropocentrism, namely the claim that it is human valuations that make valuable whatever has value, and that for that reason ascriptions of value must all be regarded as somehow anthropocentric. For my part, I do not accept the premise of this argument, as I cannot accept that it is human judgements that contribute the value to whatever is valuable, or, come to that, the disvalue of whatever is correspondingly bad. Thus animal pain surely had as much negative value before there were humans to declare it so or make it so as it does now; there again, health would be valuable even if it went unnoticed, or even if all valuers had fallen into a deep sleep and ceased to perform valuations.

But that is not the key point. What we need to avoid here is conflating two separate issues. One of these is the normative issue, of anthropocentrism versus its contraries, concerned with the bearers of moral standing and related questions. Quite a different issue is that of what

⁶ Peter Carruthers, *The Animals Issue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 169.

⁷ R.G. Frey, *Rights, Killing and Suffering: Moral Vegetarianism and Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

⁸ Michael P.T. Leahy, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁹ Eugene C. Hargrove, *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989).

¹⁰ Mark Sagoff, *The Economy of the Earth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

confers value on its bearers, and whether claims about such value are grounded in human judgements or not. This second issue is a meta-ethical issue, and not at all a normative one. Hence even if someone believes that all value is generated by human judgements, this gives them no reason at all to be anthropocentric, and hold that humans alone have moral standing and that human interests are the only interests that matter. To avoid confusion, another term is needed for the claim that value is generated by human judgements. A suitable term was devised by a philosopher who all but adheres to that view, J. Baird Callicott; such value is, he claims, 'anthropogenic'. (This is of course, the same word as has more recently been used to recognise that global warming is largely humanly generated, a topic to which other speakers in this series are due to return.) As Callicott recognises, an anthropogenic view of value (such as he half-endorses) does not begin to support an anthropocentric stance which (rightly in my view) he opposes. However, since Callicott wants to recognise that other mammals also perform valuations, he ends up preferring the view that values are not strictly anthropogenic but (what he calls) 'vertebragenic'.¹¹ But this refinement relates to meta-ethics, and need not detain us. The relevant point is rather that no meta-ethical claim (such as the anthropogenic theory of value) supplies grounds for anthropocentrism, and thus that any sympathies we may have for this theory should not incline us to adopt a normative anthropocentric view. (As if to epitomise this, Callicott has persistently opposed Norton's normative anthropocentrism.)

2. Aristotelian Approaches

It is time now to review how Norton's appeal to a broad understanding of human interests has been enlarged upon by other anthropocentric theorists. Such theorists needed a reply to Richard Routley's thought-experiment about the Last Man, the sole survivor of a nuclear catastrophe, who has only hours to live, and who, in setting about a tree with an axe without any possibility of benefitting either himself or anyone else (since everyone else has died) is still usually thought to be acting wrongly. Routley's verdict is effectively that our judgement that the Last Man's act is wrong is best diagnosed as suggesting that we presuppose that the tree matters for itself, or has moral standing, or (as it is sometimes put) that its continued thriving

¹¹ J. Baird Callicott, 'Rolston on Intrinsic Value: A Deconstruction', *Environmental Ethics*, 14 (1992), 129–143.

has intrinsic value, although I will seek to sidestep the controversies surrounding the notion of intrinsic value for present purposes. John Benson seeks to avoid adopting this diagnosis, and suggests instead that what makes the Last Man's act wrong is that he harms himself.¹² To vindicate this view, he might well need to show that people's well-being depends on the integrity of their character, as many Aristotelians hold. But this view seems heroic, because it effectively denies the possibility that 'the wicked' can 'flourish as the green bay-tree' while remaining wicked; well-being and character seem not to be quite as closely related as Benson requires. Thus Routley's response seemingly remains intact, as long as we stipulate on his behalf that there are no other sentient creatures remaining alive and liable to be benefited by the act of the Last Man.

Another anthropocentric response to Routley's kind of position has been made in the more explicit Aristotelianism of John O'Neill, who makes the flourishing of most living creatures constitutive of human well-being (including, presumably, that of the Last Man). Human good involves the development of characteristic human faculties and capacities, granted the presence of suitable objects and circumstances. Thus 'the flourishing of many other living things ought to be promoted because they are constitutive of our own flourishing', just as, according to Aristotle himself, caring for friends for their own sake is constitutive of the flourishing of the friend who cares about them.¹³ (A closely similar position is adopted in the recent monograph of O'Neill, Alan Holland and Andrew Light entitled *Environmental Values*.¹⁴) The last man's act of vandalism shows him to be living a life below the level that is best for a human being, because he fails to care for, but instead destroys, one of the creatures constitutive of his own good.¹⁵

These claims about what constitutes a flourishing human life, as O'Neill recognizes, have to be defended. The most promising approach, he suggests, is an appeal to the claim that a good human life requires a breadth of goods, far richer than, for example, egoism could recognize. The connection with care for the natural world turns out to consist in the fact that the recognition and promotion of natural goods as ends in themselves involve just such an

¹² John Benson, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction with Readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹³ John O'Neill, *Ecology, Policy and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 24.

¹⁴ John O'Neill, Alan Holland and Andrew Light, *Environmental Values* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 120–121.

¹⁵ O'Neill, *Ecology, Policy and Politics*, 24.

enrichment.¹⁶ Further, when our powers of perception are extended through disinterested study of natural creatures, as in science and art, characteristic human powers are developed thereby,¹⁷ and this is also a component of human well-being.¹⁸

O'Neill recognizes that this is an anthropocentric ethic, but regards it as not objectionably so, since nonhuman creatures for which people care are not being treated as means or instrumentally. According to this ethic, adults would teach children to care for many (but not all) natural entities for their own sake, but the ultimate object would be not the good of the natural objects of such care but the good of the children. Human good would supply the sole basis for concern for nature, and thus the sole underlying motivation for such care as well.

This account of human good captures some important truths. One is its Aristotelian emphasis on human flourishing involving the development of human capacities, including the capacities for disinterested love, care and friendship. O'Neill would need to supply far more argument to make it seem plausible that all our obligations could actually be derived from our living a flourishing life; but any credible ethic needs a defensible conception of such a life, and O'Neill's account contributes to such a conception, particularly with respect to his claim that a good human life requires a breadth of goods. Having argued elsewhere for a detailed version of an Aristotelian conception of human flourishing, incorporating non-distinctive or generic goods such as physical health as well as distinctive human excellences such as practical wisdom,¹⁹ I welcome O'Neill's general account of human good. Thus it well supplements those of Thompson and of Benson.

There is also good reason to welcome aspects of O'Neill's treatment of the problem of motivation for caring for nature. For the recognition and promotion of natural goods really can comprise an enrichment, as well as contributing a sense of proportion and a heightened sensitivity, and so the argument that caring for nature benefits human beings has substance for at least some cases. But this argument also has its limits, where such caring for nature is in competition with

¹⁶ Ibid., 24–25.

¹⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹⁸ Ibid., 161.

¹⁹ Robin Attfield, *A Theory of Value and Obligation* (London, New York and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987), chs 3 and 4; *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Éditions Rodopi, 1995), chs 4 and 5.

other sources of benefit, just as there are limits to the argument against ethical egoism that caring for others characteristically produces net benefits for the carer. (For while it characteristically produces benefits, there are also predictable and persistent costs, and so the claim that it characteristically produces net benefits is an exaggeration.) Indeed caring for nature sometimes accompanies alienation from human society. Nevertheless there is merit in O'Neill's argument, which supplies one possible answer to the question 'Why should I care?'

However, the theories holding that care for natural goods is constitutive of a flourishing human life (let us call this 'the constitutiveness theory') and that this is why we should care for and promote these goods (I will call this 'the motivation theory') are open to criticism. Thus while recognition and promotion of natural goods enrich our lives, so too could awareness of quite different ranges of objects of wonder, from mineral gemstones to synthetic gemstones, or again of human performances from sport to ballet. If what is needed for enrichment and a flourishing life is a breadth of goods, cultivation of natural goods is just one of the options, which could be replaced by cultivation of a range of languages or a range of sports or artistic activities, and which could accordingly be discarded as soon as a conflict with clashing human interests arises. Similarly, spiritual fulfilment does not invariably require promotion of natural goods either, as a whole range of other modes and varieties are available. Relatedly, while the development (or 'extension') of our powers of perception normally contributes to human flourishing, this does not require the objects of perception themselves to be flourishing; indeed some branches of science, such as pathology, require the opposite. Even the science of ecology, for which a study of well-functioning systems is central, can develop the powers of its participants in observing declining or disappearing species, or through studying the detrimental effects of climate change.

Besides, human flourishing, as I have argued elsewhere,²⁰ does not require the development of every one of a person's characteristic human capacities, although it does plausibly require that of most. Although blindness and lameness are liabilities, we would not deny that someone was flourishing or leading a rounded and fulfilling life simply because she was either blind or lame. And even if we are lovers of classical music or of sculpture, we would surely have to allow that people could be flourishing who are unmoved by (or blind to) sculpture, or deaf to the delights of classical music. So

²⁰ Attfield, *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics*, 45–62.

even if the attainment of certain kinds of perception, sensitivity or contemplation relating to nature comprise fulfilments or developments of capacities that would contribute (in conjunction with a range of other fulfilments) to a person's flourishing, it cannot be inferred from their atrophy or their under-development that a person is failing to flourish; for a range of their other powers (of physical prowess, of wit, of musical or artistic performance, or of other kinds of sensitivity such as empathy for friends) might be sufficiently developed as readily to compensate for the apparent deficiency and to undermine this conclusion. But if so, the constitutiveness theory fails, both in itself, and as underpinning for the motivation theory, since neither natural goods nor care for them are, strictly speaking, constitutive of a flourishing human life. To affirm that they are thus constitutive is, I suggest, wishful thinking. Indeed I can think of a philosopher apparently leading a flourishing life who professes no interest whatever in such natural goods.

Similarly, while a reflective awareness of nature's otherness can provide the benefits already mentioned, a comparative unawareness of it (as in failure to reflect on the world of nature at all) need not spell lack of perspective or absence of a sense of proportion. For these benefits could be derived from other sources, such as human conversation, reading novels and biographies, experience of life's vicissitudes, or simply humorous exchanges. Such unawareness certainly need not betoken egoism, from which we may be rescued, for example, through participation in all kinds of inter-human relationships. Hence, while some basic awareness of nature's otherness may be a precondition of human life and thus human well-being, explicit or reflective awareness of this otherness cannot be regarded as constitutive of or essential to human flourishing, even though it can importantly contribute to such a life. Once again, there is certainly no reason why everyone should care or needs to care about natural goods or to seek to promote them; yet this is what environmentally enlightened versions of anthropocentrism ultimately need to show.

The gap between arguments from human flourishing and reasons to care about natural goods becomes apparent in further ways. Let it be granted that some natural goods are somehow constitutive of particular people's flourishing. (This could be because of the contingency that they care about a particular childhood haunt or pet animal, and would become desolate or even fall apart if the haunt were destroyed or the pet were to die.) Even so, not enough natural goods are plausibly constitutive of the flourishing of enough people for this to comprise a sufficiently pervasive reason for their protection or preservation. For even if all so far explored places and all known

species were cared about by at least someone, it is fairly certain that unexplored places (such as the ocean depths and the waters beneath the Antarctic icecap) and undiscovered species (including the species in these places, and probably towards some thirty million others located in places such as tropical forests and coral reefs) are not constitutive of anyone's flourishing. Nor, in the many cases where just a few people care about a species, is regard for these people likely to comprise a strong enough ground to outweigh the benefits likely to arise to humanity from building on the habitat or site on which the species depends for its survival. Some of the grounds for preserving species, admittedly, turn on future interests. But the present point remains clear: the particular argument from natural goods being constitutive of the flourishing of current human beings cannot supply grounds for preserving enough nonhuman creatures. O'Neill suggests no more than that it supplies grounds for the preservation of 'a large number';²¹ but its scope turns out not remotely to correspond to the range of creatures that environmentalists and environmental ethicists would standardly wish to preserve.

The same gap emerges if we reflect on the future of nonhuman species after the demise of humanity. While the future of humanity may stretch to millions of years, that of nonhuman life could possibly extend to trillions. But the posthuman flourishing of nonhuman creatures is unlikely to be constitutive of the flourishing of many people, present or future, if of any. So the argument from human flourishing (including that of future people) supplies insufficient grounds to facilitate the posthuman survival and flourishing of other creatures through human protection of nonhuman species from extinction in the last few generations of human existence. Human actions could well make a difference to the survival of many kinds of nonhuman life across vast eras of the posthuman future, but arguments from human flourishing would seem to have little or no bearing on such actions.

A related issue arises without any need for a thought-experiment, that of how to account on an anthropocentric basis for the wrongness of cruelty to animals, and neglect of the animals in one's charge. Anthropocentrists have to claim that this is entirely grounded in human welfare, and largely in the difference made either to the flourishing or the character of the human agent concerned. But we do not need to know whether the agent's well-being or character suffers or degenerates to know that such cruelty or neglect is wrong, and this

²¹ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, note 13, 24; O'Neill, Holland and Light, *op. cit.*, note 14, 120–121.

would seem to be because the animals' suffering matters in itself, irrespective of effects on the agent. While this is not an objection to sentientism (and thus to Thompson's position), it is a formidable problem for anthropocentrist efforts to make human well-being, however broadly construed, the sole criterion of ethics. O'Neill, Holland, Light and Benson are right to remind us of the breadth of human flourishing and of its far-reaching environmental implications, but environmental ethics (and normative ethics in general) has reason to appeal directly to nonhuman flourishing as well, to account for standard, everyday judgements in these and other areas. These considerations also serve to refute the claim made by Norton that non-anthropocentric considerations are superfluous because they merely uphold the same judgements as anthropocentric ones, and add nothing that is distinctive of their own.²²

Normative ethics, then, cannot be confined to considerations of human flourishing and related interests; nor, I now want to argue, can human motivation. The motivation theory, it will be recollected, holds that the reason why we should care for and promote natural goods consists in human flourishing (of which these goods are supposedly constitutive), and is often defended on the basis that there can be no other reason for doing this. But this basis should itself be questioned. In one version it suggests that reasons for action always turn on the well-being of the agent herself. But if so, it would make little sense to appeal (as environmentalists regularly do) to the well-being of future generations, and it would be difficult to understand people who devote themselves to the well-being of other people, or of other species, or of causes that transcend their lifetime. It would also be difficult to make sense of genuine friendship, with its concern for the friend for her or his own sake. While, as Aristotle held, such friendship may be constitutive of human well-being, this kind of friendship cannot be entered into or fostered solely for the sake of one's own flourishing. Maybe, as Ernest Partridge has argued, human beings have a need for self-transcendence, for commitment, that is, to concerns and causes that transcend their own interests.²³ But commitments of this kind are not standardly undertaken to gratify this need, and could not in the normal course of events be undertaken on this basis. For if they were undertaken on

²² Bryan Norton, *Towards Unity among Environmentalists* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²³ Ernest Partridge, 'Why Care about the Future?', in Partridge (ed.), *Responsibilities to Future Generations: Environmental Ethics* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1981), 203–220.

this basis, this very need could not be gratified. Motivation, then, does not have to appeal to the well-being of the agent. (Much less, as O'Neill shrewdly remarks, does it need to appeal to identification with what the agent cares about; we can be just as concerned about what we regard as other than ourselves as with our own selves, however broadly 'selves' are construed.)²⁴

A less implausible version of the claim that human flourishing underlies all motivation holds that reasons for action always turn on the well-being of one or another human being, who need not be the agent in question. This version is less implausible than the egoistic version because (unlike the other) it can explain motivations like friendship, patriotism and loyalty to a good many campaigns and causes. But it fails to account for behaviour motivated by concern for the welfare of animals (except where there are social reasons for such concern, such as the contracts of a veterinarian with her human clients). For example, it fails to account for the motivations of most members of the pressure group Compassion in World Farming. Similarly it fails to account for the disinterested concerns of preservationists, who are not invariably seeking to preserve their own local environment, but often seek to protect spatially distant ones, and not invariably for the sake of any humans that may be affected at that.

As O'Neill recognizes, there is widespread concern for natural creatures for their own sake. While it is true that this does not of itself show that the well-being of these creatures has independent value, the preceding discussion shows that there must be reasons for this concern independent of the well-being of the people who have the concern, and that there can be reasons altogether independent of the well-being of human beings. Further, the analogy with friendship suggests that there can be unconditional concern (which need not be grounded in one's own good) for the good of the other: of the friend, or, in this case, of the creatures concerned. We do humanity a disservice when we pretend that nothing can stir us to action apart from members of our own species and their well-being.

Nor must theories of motivation be confined to the interests of sentient species, or of species with a point of view. Thus the concerns of preservationists are not so restricted; and the Last Man thought-experiment (discussed above) may well be thought to suggest that there is something of intrinsic value, that is, some independent reason for protection, attached to the continued flourishing of a tree.

²⁴ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, note 13, 149–151.

There is also Donald Scherer's thought-experiment. Compare a planet without life (which he names 'Lifeless') with a planet harbouring organisms with capacities for photosynthesis, reproduction and self-maintenance (which he calls 'Flora').²⁵ Even if neither planet has any potential to benefit sentient beings elsewhere in the universe (not even through aesthetic enjoyment), most people take the view that, while there is no value in Lifeless, there is value in Flora, and understand this as a reason to preserve Flora in the event of human plans to disrupt or destroy it. Flora cannot benefit these same people or other sentient beings, and yet its inhabitants are held to carry intrinsic value in a sense that comprises a reason or ground for action. Perhaps, then, we also do humanity a disservice if we pretend (with sentientists) that nothing can stir us to action apart from the interests of humans and other sentient beings.

It begins to look as if a non-anthropocentric and non-sentientist normative ethic is needed to accommodate the full range of reasons by which human beings are capable of being motivated. Far from being incoherent or vacuous or yielding no clear guidance, theories of normative ethics of these kinds are actually needed if natural goods are to be recognized and treated seriously, and if the pool of human motivation is not to be misrepresented as shallower than it is. We may also conclude, with Thompson, O'Neill and Benson, that human well-being (involving as it does the development of most if not all characteristic human capacities) supplies a broad basis for many kinds of environmental concern, albeit not a comprehensive or all-encompassing one.

3. Other Approaches

However, other philosophical approaches might seem to confer a greater cogency, or even inescapability, on anthropocentrism. Thus one version of anthropocentrism is simply the thesis that we, as human beings, cannot help making all our valuations with human faculties and from a human perspective. Frederick Ferré has named this harmless claim 'perspectival anthropocentrism'.²⁶ But this harmless and almost tautological stance, which is sometimes regarded

²⁵ Donald Scherer, 'Anthropocentrism, Atomism and Environmental Ethics', in Donald Scherer and Thomas Attig (eds), *Ethics and the Environment* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 73–81.

²⁶ Frederick Ferré, 'Personalistic Organicism: Paradox or Paradigm?', in Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey (eds), *Philosophy and the Natural*

as a vindication of anthropocentrism in general, is far removed from the claim of normative anthropocentrism that only human interests matter, and gives it no shred of support. For human values remain free to take nonhuman interests seriously, such as the interests of other primates, despite reasoning within a human perspective. We just need to take care and avoid conflating harmless perspectival anthropocentrism with its normative homonym, just as turns out to be possible when we distinguish anthropocentrism and its non-relation, the anthropogenic theory of value.

Yet others reason inductively to the near-inevitability of adherence to anthropocentrism from its pervasive presence among those who seek to escape it. Thus Eric Katz finds anthropocentrism lurking beneath the surface in the writings of Deep Ecologists, and particularly those who stress the identification of the self and nature, understood as one's greater Self.²⁷ For example, some Deep Ecologists reason as follows. I have a duty to protect myself. But properly understood, nature and myself are one and the same thing, my greater Self. (Let us for present purposes not question this far-reaching claim.) Therefore I have a duty to protect nature or the biosphere against whatever may be attacking or endangering it. Here Katz is surely right, for the reason given for protecting nature consists in the importance of protecting a human self. Indeed the argument is not only anthropocentric, but is also an appeal to ethical egoism, while at the same time inviting us to suspend our disbelief in there being no boundaries between oneself and the rest of nature. In this and other ways Katz seems to vindicate his claim, where Deep Ecology is concerned.

However, this gives us no reason to conclude that normative anthropocentrism is inevitable. Indeed Katz has also argued, jointly with Lauren Oechsli, that a nonanthropocentric ethic is needed to justify the protection of the rainforest of Brazil, which must be protected not only as a resource, let alone instrumentally, but because of the value of its constituent creatures;²⁸ human interests, they suggest,

Environment (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 59–73, at 72.

²⁷ Eric Katz, 'Against the Inevitability of Anthropocentrism', in Eric Katz, Andrew Light and David Rothenburg (eds), *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000), 17–42.

²⁸ Eric Katz and Lauren Oechsli, 'Moving Beyond Anthropocentrism: Environmental Ethics, Development and the Amazon', *Environmental Ethics*, **15** (1993), 49–59.

are insufficient alone, even when scientific and aesthetic interests are taken into account. Katz and Oechsli do not put forward a specific value-theory, nor am I defending any such specific theory here, despite holding one. Yet their stance illustrates how a normative theory not grounded solely in human interests is possible and can be taken seriously.

Katz and Oechsli have been well criticised in the recent work mentioned earlier by the trio of O'Neill, Holland and Light, *Environmental Values*. Katz and Oechsli seek to make our direct duties to the rainforest at least tie-breakers to debates between the human interests in preservation on the one hand and development on the other, and effectively trumps which override considerations based on human interests altogether. But, as the trio reply, even if nonanthropocentric values are recognised, the tug between the competing claims of intra-human justice and of human well-being would still be felt. Thus nonanthropocentrism should not be regarded as a new ethical theory that somehow supersedes all our traditional moral perplexities.²⁹ Katz and Oechsli partially recognise this themselves when, in their concluding remarks, they accept that western countries which expect Brazil to hold back from development to preserve its rainforests are also obliged to compensate Brazil with financial assistance.³⁰ Yet their critics could continue to ask why the value of the rainforest is taken to resolve the debate about preservation of itself, and to relegate the debate about inter-human equity to a subsequent and subordinate phase of deliberation.

Yet the value of the rainforest and of its constituent creatures should, as Katz and Oechsli affirm, figure in such debates, not only because of the impact of their continuation or extinction on human interests, but for themselves. It is one thing to show that the distinctive elements of nonanthropocentrism cannot be regarded as trumping all other considerations; it is quite another to maintain, as the trio appear to do, that there is no place for those distinctive considerations at all, on the ground that 'the everyday human scale of values', which they interpret as involving anthropocentrism, is sufficient.³¹ Human needs, admittedly, sometimes override those of nonhumans; but it by no means follows that nonhuman needs can be ignored. Given, as the trio assert, that there are competing values, issues will not be better resolved by disregarding any of them; and in any case the everyday human values of many human traditions have plausibly included

²⁹ O'Neill, Holland and Light, *op. cit.*, note 14, 179–182.

³⁰ Katz and Oechsli, *op. cit.*, note 28, 58–59.

³¹ O'Neill, Holland and Light, *op. cit.*, note 14, 179–180.

recognition of the standing and the value of nonhuman creatures all along.³² It is not anthropocentrism, with its humanity-only approach, that reflects the full range of ‘the human scale of values’, but non-anthropocentrism. We need a comprehensive ethic, and no ethic will be comprehensive unless it is non-anthropocentric.

Two other prominent British philosophers have recently discussed human values, with contrasting conclusions about environmental values and nonanthropocentrism. The answer given by Bernard Williams to his own question ‘Must a Concern for the Environment Be Centred on Human Beings?’ (which is also the title of an essay of his) is affirmative; environmental values need not be restricted to human interests, but they must still reflect ‘human values’, values, that is, which human beings can ‘understand themselves as pursuing and respecting’.³³ According to Williams, however, these values probably do not answer to non-human interests, since in his view few such interests have any ‘claim’ on us, and those that do not are morally irrelevant.

But there is a large implicit assumption here: human beings cannot understand themselves as pursuing or respecting the interests of most non-human creatures. Common experience casts doubt on this suggestion (sufficiently to sustain the credibility of non-anthropocentrism in some of its versions). Instead, Williams considers that our ‘Promethean fear’ of nature and its sublimity encodes further values concerning the independence of nature as backdrop of human life and as a source of limits to the possibility of controlling it. Perhaps for some this psychological story rings true, but the basis of these further values remains unilluminated. Williams does not explicitly claim that environmental concern rests largely on values grounded in preserving the framework of human culture and agency, as opposed to seeking to discredit theories of a contrary tendency. If, however, someone were to make this claim, it would give humanity-focused theorists an unduly self-preoccupied stance. Perhaps this claim embodies an aspect of the truth; but the implicit suggestion that human beings can only understand themselves as pursuing or respecting either their own interests or the conditions

³² See Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Oxford: Blackwell and New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), chs 2 and 3.

³³ Bernard Williams, ‘Must a Concern for the Environment Be Centred on Human Beings?’ in Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers, 1982–1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233–240, at 234.

of their own agency has only to be articulated to be exposed for the exaggeration that it is.

While Williams seems close to anthropocentrism, David Wiggins, who is billed as a later contributor to this series, interprets similar ground with wider sympathies. In an address to the Aristotelian Society, Wiggins has developed Williams's themes of human values and nature's sublimity, stressing that 'the human scale of values' extends far enough beyond 'human values' (a phrase used by Wiggins to mean 'values that concern human flourishing')³⁴, to include disinterested concern for the survival and well-being of wild creatures, and generally 'the great framework for a life on earth in which ... human beings can find meaning'³⁵, but which has latterly become vulnerable. This is a profound paper, imaginatively supportive of green concerns (far more so than Williams), despite Wiggins' understandable scepticism about some forms of environmental ethics and metaphysics; and in recognising values that transcend human flourishing, Wiggins clearly interprets his own phrase 'the human scale of values' in a non-anthropocentric manner, and thus moves himself decisively beyond anthropocentrism.

Yet Wiggins' paper could be read as implying that human environmental concern (and 'the human scale of values'), apart from its 'disinterested concern for wild creatures' (which might possibly concern sentient creatures only), is confined to this framework alone, that is 'the great framework for a life on earth in which ... human beings can find meaning', as opposed to other frameworks (such as Scherer's planet Flora) related to other worlds, where no human has ever found meaning or perhaps will or ever could find it. But even if no human could ever find meaning there, it is by no means apparent that Flora (with its trees and other plants) has no independent value, and should not be spared destruction if this were ever to become an option for humanity; indeed this point is enough of itself to undermine Norton's claim that exactly the same actions and policies are dictated by anthropocentric as by non-anthropocentric principles. The same applies to the forms of life on our own planet that may well outlive humanity, and thus become a sphere where, because of human extinction, no human could ever live a meaningful life; for it might well become an option for human beings before the demise of our species to preclude the survival of such post-human life, and yet there could be reasons consisting in

³⁴ David Wiggins, 'Nature, Respect for Nature, and the Human Scale of Values', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, C (2000), 1–32, at 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10; cf. 18.

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its independent value not to prevent such life, despite the absence of possibilities for humans of finding meaning there. Making our duties depend on possibilities of meaning for humans (which may, however, be a misreading of Wiggins' intentions) could ensnare us in a covert anthropocentrism all over again. So it is possible for even sophisticated attempts to explore and sift anthropocentrism to fail to distinguish truisms (such as 'all our values are human values'), together with their apparent implications, from traps (such as 'our ethical concerns are confined to what benefits us or makes our lives meaningful'). Where normative principles are at stake, we need to respect not only human beings and their interests, but also forms of life that are other than ourselves, whether they are sentient or not, and whether or not we can identify with them.

None of this suggests that we should give ethical priority to remote species, let alone to distant planets, ahead of humanity. Little that I have said relates to such matters of priorities, although it could be applied so as to do so. What is more to the point is the conclusion that without concern for the living nonhuman beings of the present and the future we unduly narrow our own horizons. It is not just that these creatures matter for themselves, or will matter if allowed to come into being, but that our failure to respect them can distort our own humanity, albeit in the name of humanism, and lead us into too narrow an understanding of what we are capable of, and thus of ourselves.

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