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"Value, Metaphysics and Anthropocentrism"

Morito, Bruce

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The lack of metaphysical grounding of environmental values, and impatience towards the enterprise of seeking such grounding, result in a superficial and wrongheaded view of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is best understood as a limiting condition, a point from which we can begin to reformulate an understanding of ourselves, our values, and our relation to the environment. It is not principally a starting point for the existence of values, as is assumed under traditional theories of anthropocentrism.

To demonstrate and elaborate on this position, the paper focuses on environmental values and how we traditionally assume them to be formed and legitimated. A critique of the analyses of two prominent figures in the field of environmental ethics, Bryan Norton and Eugene Hargrove, serves as the backdrop against which an alternative view is formed. This alternative is metaphysically grounded in an ecologically informed analysis of valuational activity. Against the tradition, the argument establishes two main points: 1) that attempts to ground environmental values on human preferences, agreements, traditions, or culturally driven commitments are liable to legitimate contrary values; and 2) that an ecologically driven analysis of values shows that valuations of the environment are not fundamentally conferred onto it by human beings. Positively, the paper attempts to show that our inclusion as members of the ecological community makes our valuational activity an integral and transformational element within more comprehensive ecological processes. As such, our moral commitment to the environment must be radically reshaped in order adequately to incorporate this renewed understanding.

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