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# Reconciling Anthropocentric and Nonanthropocentric Environmental Ethics\*

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**ABSTRACT:** I propose to show that when the most morally defensible versions of an anthropocentric environmental ethics and a nonanthropocentric ethics are laid out, they would lead us to accept the same principles of environmental justice.

**KEYWORDS:** Anthropocentric, nonanthropocentric, nonquestion-begging

A central debate, if not the most central debate, in contemporary environmental ethics is between those who defend an anthropocentric ethics and those who defend a nonanthropocentric ethics. This debate pits deep ecologists like George Sessions against reform or shallow ecologists like John Passmore.<sup>1</sup> It divides biocentric egalitarians like Paul Taylor from social ecologists like Murray Bookchin.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I propose to go some way toward resolving this debate by showing that when the most morally defensible versions of each of these perspectives are laid out, they do not lead to different practical requirements. In this way I hope to show how it is possible for defenders of anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric environmental ethics, despite their theoretical disagreement concerning whether humans are superior to members of other species, to agree on a common set of principles for achieving environmental justice.<sup>3</sup>

## NONANTHROPOCENTRIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Consider first the nonanthropocentric perspective. In support of this perspective it can be argued that we have no nonquestion-begging grounds for regarding the members of any living species as superior to the members of any other. It allows that the members of species differ in a myriad of ways, but argues that these

differences do not provide grounds for thinking that the members of any one species are superior to the members of any other. In particular, it denies that the differences between species provides grounds for thinking that humans are superior to the members of other species. Of course, the nonanthropocentric perspective recognises that humans have distinctive traits which the members of other species lack, like rationality and moral agency. It just points out that the members of nonhuman species also have distinctive traits that humans lack, like the homing ability of pigeons, the speed of the cheetah, and the ruminative ability of sheep and cattle.

Nor will it do to claim that the distinctive traits that humans have are more valuable than the distinctive traits that members of other species possess because there is no nonquestion-begging standpoint from which to justify that claim. From a human standpoint, rationality and moral agency are more valuable than any of the distinctive traits found in nonhuman species, since, as humans, we would not be better off if we were to trade in those traits for the distinctive traits found in nonhuman species. Yet the same holds true of nonhuman species. Pigeons, cheetahs, sheep and cattle would not be better off if they were to trade in their distinctive traits for the distinctive traits of other species.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the members of some species might be better off if they could retain the distinctive traits of their species while acquiring one or another of the distinctive traits possessed by some other species. For example, we humans might be better off if we could retain our distinctive traits while acquiring the ruminative ability of sheep and cattle.<sup>5</sup> But many of the distinctive traits of species cannot be even imaginatively added to the members of other species without substantially altering the original species. For example, in order for the cheetah to acquire the distinctive traits possessed by humans, presumably it would have to be so transformed that its paws became something like hands to accommodate its humanlike mental capabilities, thereby losing its distinctive speed, and ceasing to be a cheetah. So possessing distinctively human traits would not be good for the cheetah. And with the possible exception of our nearest evolutionary relatives, the same holds true for the members of other species: they would not be better off having distinctively human traits. Only in fairy tales and in the world of Disney can the members of nonhuman species enjoy a full array of distinctively human traits. So there would appear to be no nonquestion-begging perspective from which to judge that distinctively human traits are more valuable than the distinctive traits possessed by other species. Judged from a nonquestion-begging perspective, we would seemingly have to regard the members of all species as equals.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, regarding the members of all species as equals still allows for human preference in the same way that regarding all humans as equals still allows for self preference. First of all, human preference can be justified on grounds of defence. Thus, we have

*A Principle of Human Defence:* Actions that defend oneself and other human beings against harmful aggression are permissible even when they necessitate killing or harming animals or plants.<sup>7</sup>

This Principle of Human Defence allows us to defend ourselves and other human beings from harmful aggression first against our persons and the persons of other humans beings that we are committed to or happen to care about and second against our justifiably held property and the justifiably held property of other humans beings that we are committed to or happen to care about. This principle is strictly analogous to the principle of self-defence that applies in human ethics<sup>8</sup> and permits actions in defence of oneself or other human beings against harmful human aggression.<sup>9</sup> In the case of human aggression, however, it will sometimes be possible to effectively defend oneself and other human beings by first suffering the aggression and then securing adequate compensation later. Since in the case of nonhuman aggression, this is unlikely to obtain, more harmful preventive actions such as killing a rabid dog or swatting a mosquito will be justified.

Second, human preference can also be justified on grounds of preservation. Accordingly, we have

*A Principle of Human Preservation:* Actions that are necessary for meeting one's basic needs or the basic needs of other human beings are permissible even when they require aggressing against the basic needs of animals and plants.

Now needs, in general, if not satisfied, lead to lacks or deficiencies with respect to various standards. The basic needs of humans, if not satisfied, lead to lacks or deficiencies with respect to a standard of a decent life. The basic needs of animals and plants, if not satisfied, lead to lacks or deficiencies with respect to a standard of a healthy life. The means necessary for meeting the basic need of humans can vary widely from society to society. By contrast, the means necessary for meeting the basic need of particular species of animals and plants tend to be invariant.<sup>10</sup>

In human ethics, there is no principle that is strictly analogous to this Principle of Human Preservation. There is a principle of self-preservation in human ethics that permits actions that are necessary for meeting one's own basic needs or the basic needs of other people, even if this requires *failing to meet* (through an act of omission) the basic needs of still other people. For example, we can use our resources to feed ourselves and our family, even if this necessitates failing to meet the basic needs of people in Third World countries. But, in general, we don't have a principle that allows us to *aggress against* (through an act of commission) the basic needs of some people in order to meet our own basic needs or the basic needs of other people to whom we are committed or happen to care about. Actually, the closest we come to permitting aggressing against the basic needs of other people in order to meet our own basic needs or

the basic needs of people to whom we are committed or happen to care about is our acceptance of the outcome of life and death struggles in lifeboat cases, where no one has an antecedent right to the available resources. For example, if you had to fight off others in order to secure the last place in a lifeboat for yourself or for a member of your family, we might say that you justifiably aggressed against the basic needs of those whom you fought to meet your own basic needs or the basic needs of the member of your family.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, our survival requires a principle of preservation that permits aggressing against the basic needs of at least some other living things whenever this is necessary to meet our own basic needs or the basic needs of other human beings. Here there are two possibilities. The first is a principle of preservation that allows us to aggress against the basic needs of both humans and nonhumans whenever it would serve our own basic needs or the basic needs of other human beings. The second is the principle, given above, that allows us to aggress against the basic needs of only nonhumans whenever it would serve our own basic needs or the basic needs of other human beings. The first principle does not express any general preference for the members of the human species, and thus it permits even cannibalism provided that it serves to meet our own basic needs or the basic needs of other human beings. In contrast, the second principle does express a degree of preference for the members of the human species in cases where their basic needs are at stake. Happily, this degree of preference for our own species is still compatible with the equality of all species because favouring the members of one's own species to this extent is characteristic of the members of all species with which we interact and is thereby legitimated. The reason it is legitimated is that we would be required to sacrifice the basic needs of members of the human species only if the members of other species were making similar sacrifices for the sake of members of the human species.<sup>12</sup> In addition, if we were to prefer consistently the basic needs of the members of other species whenever those needs conflicted with our own (or even if we do so half the time), given the characteristic behaviour of the members of other species, we would soon be facing extinction, and, fortunately, we have no reason to think that we are morally required to bring about our own extinction. For these reasons, the degree of preference for our own species found in the above Principle of Human Preservation is justified, even if we were to adopt a nonanthropocentric perspective.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, preference for humans can go beyond bounds, and the bounds that are compatible with a nonanthropocentric perspective are expressed by the following:

*A Principle of Disproportionality:* Actions that meet nonbasic or luxury needs of humans are prohibited when they aggress against the basic needs of animals and plants.

This principle is strictly analogous to the principle in human ethics mentioned previously that prohibits meeting some people's nonbasic or luxury needs by aggressing against the basic needs of other people.<sup>14</sup>

Without a doubt, the adoption of such a principle with respect to nonhuman nature would significantly change the way we live our lives. Such a principle is required, however, if there is to be any substance to the claim that the members of all species are equal. We can no more consistently claim that the members of all species are equal and yet aggress against the basic needs of some animals or plants whenever this serves our own nonbasic or luxury needs than we can consistently claim that all humans are equal and aggress against the basic needs of some other human beings whenever this serves our nonbasic or luxury needs.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, if species equality is to mean anything, it must be the case that the basic needs of the members of nonhuman species are protected against aggressive actions which only serve to meet the nonbasic needs of humans, as required by the Principle of Disproportionality.<sup>16</sup>

So while a nonanthropocentric perspective allows for a degree of preference for the members of the human species, it also significantly limits that preference.<sup>17</sup>

It might be objected here that I have not yet taken into account the conflict within a nonanthropocentric ethics between holists and individualists. According to holists, the good of a species or the good of an ecosystem or the good of the whole biotic community can trump the good of individual living things.<sup>18</sup> According to individualists, the good of each individual living thing must be respected.<sup>19</sup>

Now one might think that holists would require that we abandon my Principle of Human Preservation. Yet consider. Assuming that people's basic needs are at stake, how could it be morally objectionable for them to try to meet those needs, even if this were to harm other species, whole ecosystems, or even, to some degree, the whole biotic community?<sup>20</sup> Of course, we can *ask* people in such conflict cases not to meet their basic needs in order to prevent harm to other species, ecosystems or the whole biotic community. But if people's basic needs are at stake, we can not reasonably demand that they make such a sacrifice. We could demand, of course, that people do all that they reasonably can to keep such conflicts from arising in the first place, for, just as in human ethics, many severe conflicts of interest can be avoided simply by doing what is morally required early on.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, when people's basic needs are at stake, the individualist perspective seems incontrovertible. We cannot reasonably require people to be saints.

At the same time, when people's basic needs are not at stake, we would be justified in acting on holistic grounds to prevent serious harm to a species, an ecosystem, or the whole biotic community. Obviously, it will be difficult to

know when our interventions will have this effect, but when we can be reasonably sure that they will, such interventions (e.g. culling elk herds in wolf-free ranges or preserving the habitat of endangered species) would be morally permissible, and maybe even morally required.<sup>22</sup> This shows that it is possible to agree with individualists when the basic needs of human beings are at stake, and to agree with holists when they are not.

Yet this combination of individualism and holism appears to conflict with the equality of species by imposing greater sacrifices on the members of nonhuman species than it does on the members of the human species. Fortunately, appearances are deceiving here. Although the proposed resolution only justifies imposing holism when people's basic needs are not at stake, it does not justify imposing individualism at all. Rather it would simply permit individualism when people's basic needs *are* at stake. Of course, we could impose holism under all conditions. But given that this would, in effect, involve going to war against people who are simply striving to meet their own basic needs in the only way they can, as permitted by the Principle of Human Preservation, intervention in such cases would not be justified.

Nevertheless, this combination of individualism and holism may leave animal liberationists wondering about the further implications of this resolution for the treatment of animals. Obviously, a good deal of work has already been done on this topic. Initially, philosophers thought that humanism could be extended to include animal liberation and eventually environmental concern.<sup>23</sup> Then Baird Callicott argued that animal liberation and environmental concern were as opposed to each other as they were to humanism.<sup>24</sup> The resulting conflict Callicott called 'a triangular affair'. Agreeing with Callicott, Mark Sagoff contended that any attempt to link together animal liberation and environmental concern would lead to 'a bad marriage and a quick divorce'.<sup>25</sup> Yet more recently, philosophers such as Mary Ann Warren have tended to play down the opposition between animal liberation and environmental concern, and even Callicott now thinks he can bring the two back together again.<sup>26</sup> There are good reasons for thinking that such a reconciliation is possible.

Right off, it would be good for the environment if people generally, especially people in the First World, adopted a more vegetarian diet of the sort that animal liberationists are recommending. This is because a good portion of livestock production today consumes grains that could be more effectively used for direct human consumption. For example, 90% of the protein, 99% of the carbohydrate, and 100% of the fibre value of grain is wasted by cycling it through livestock, and currently 64% of the U.S. grain crop is fed to livestock.<sup>27</sup> So by adopting a more vegetarian diet, people generally, and especially people in the First World, could significantly reduce the amount of farmland that has to be kept in production to feed the human population. This, in turn, could have beneficial effects on the whole biotic community by eliminating the amount of soil erosion and environmental pollutants that result from raising livestock. For example, it has been estimated that 85% of U.S. topsoil lost from cropland,

pasture, range land and forest land is directly associated with raising livestock.<sup>28</sup> So in addition to preventing animal suffering, there are these additional reasons to favour a more vegetarian diet.

But even though a more vegetarian diet seems in order, it is not clear that the interests of farm animals would be well served if all of us became complete vegetarians. Sagoff assumes that in a completely vegetarian human world people would continue to feed farm animals as before.<sup>29</sup> But it is not clear that we would have any obligation to do so. Moreover, in a completely vegetarian human world, we would probably need about half of the grain we now feed livestock to meet people's nutritional needs, particularly in Second and Third World countries. There simply would not be enough grain to go around. And then there would be the need to conserve cropland for future generations. So in a completely vegetarian human world, it seems likely that the population of farm animals would be decimated, relegating many of the farm animals that remain to zoos. On this account, it would seem to be more in the interest of farm animals generally that they be maintained under healthy conditions, and then killed relatively painlessly and eaten, rather than that they not be maintained at all.<sup>30</sup> So a completely vegetarian human world would not seem to serve the interest of farm animals.<sup>31</sup>

Nor, it seems, would it be in the interest of wild species who no longer have their natural predators not to be hunted by humans. Of course, where possible, it may be preferable to reintroduce natural predators. But this may not always be possible because of the proximity of farm animals and human populations, and then if action is not taken to control the populations of wild species, disaster could result for the species and their environments. For example, deer, rabbits, squirrels, quails and ducks reproduce rapidly, and in the absence of predators can quickly exceed the carrying capacity of their environments. So it is in the interest of certain wild species and their environments that humans intervene periodically to maintain a balance. Of course, there will be many natural environments where it is in the interest of the environment and the wild animals that inhabit it to be simply left alone. But here too animal liberation and environmental concern would not be in conflict. For these reasons, animal liberationists would have little reason to object to the proposed combination of individualism and holism within a nonanthropocentric environmental ethics.

## ANTHROPOCENTRIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

But suppose we were to reject the central argument of the nonanthropocentric perspective and deny that the members of all species are equal. We might claim, for example, that humans are superior because they, through culture, 'realize a greater range of values' than members of nonhuman species or we might claim that humans are superior in virtue of their 'unprecedented capacity to create



ethical systems that impart worth to other life-forms'.<sup>32</sup> Or we might offer some other grounds for human superiority.<sup>33</sup> Suppose, then, we adopt this anthropocentric perspective. What follows?

First of all, we will still need a principle of human defence. However, there is no need to adopt a different principle of human defence from the principle favoured by a nonanthropocentric perspective. Whether we judge humans to be equal or superior to the members of other species, we will still want a principle that allows us to defend ourselves and other human beings from harmful aggression, even when this necessitates killing or harming animals or plants.

Second, we will also need a principle of human preservation. But here too there is no need to adopt a different principle from the principle of human preservation favoured by a nonanthropocentric perspective. Whether we judge humans to be equal or superior to the members of other species, we will still want a principle that permits actions that are necessary for meeting our own basic needs or the basic needs of other human beings, even when this requires aggressing against the basic needs of animals and plants.

The crucial question is whether we will need a different principle of disproportionality. If we judged humans to be superior to the members of other species, will we still have grounds for protecting the basic needs of animals and plants against aggressive action to meet the nonbasic or luxury needs of humans?

Here it is important to distinguish between two degrees of preference that we noted earlier. First, we could prefer the basic needs of animals and plants over the nonbasic or luxury needs of humans when to do otherwise would involve *aggressing against* (by an act of commission) the basic needs of animals and plants. Second, we could prefer the basic needs of animals and plants over the nonbasic or luxury needs of humans when to do otherwise would involve simply *failing to meet* (by an act of omission) the basic needs of animals and plants.

Now in human ethics when the basic needs of some people are in conflict with the nonbasic or luxury needs of others, the distinction between failing to meet and aggressing against basic needs seems to have little moral force. In such conflict cases, both ways of not meeting basic needs are objectionable.<sup>34</sup>

But in environmental ethics, whether we adopt an anthropocentric or a nonanthropocentric perspective, we would seem to have grounds for morally distinguishing between the two cases, favouring the basic needs of animals and plants when to do otherwise would involve *aggressing against* those needs in order to meet our own nonbasic or luxury needs, but not when it would involve simply *failing to meet* those needs in order to meet our own nonbasic or luxury needs. This degree of preference for the members of the human species would be compatible with the equality of species insofar as members of nonhuman species similarly fail to meet the basic needs of members of the human species where there is a conflict of interest.<sup>35</sup>

Even so, this theoretical distinction would have little practical force since most of the ways that we have of preferring our own nonbasic needs over the

basic needs of animals and plants actually involve aggressing against their basic needs to meet our own nonbasic or luxury needs rather than simply failing to meet their basic needs.<sup>36</sup>

Yet even if most of the ways that we have of preferring our own nonbasic or luxury needs does involve aggressing against the basic needs of animals and plants, wouldn't human superiority provide grounds for making such sacrifices? Or put another way, shouldn't human superiority have more theoretical and practical significance than I am allowing? Not, I claim, if we are looking for the most morally defensible position to take.

For consider: The claim that humans are superior to the members of other species, if it can be justified at all, is something like the claim that a person came in first in a race where others came in second, third, fourth, and so on. It would not imply that the members of other species are without intrinsic value. In fact, it would imply just the opposite – that the members of other species are also intrinsically valuable, although not as intrinsically valuable as humans, just as the claim that a person came in first in a race implies that the persons who came in second, third, fourth, and so on are also meritorious, although not as meritorious as the person who came in first.

This line of argument draws further support once we consider the fact that many animals and plants are superior to humans in one respect or another, e.g., the sense of smell of the wolf or the acuity of sight of the eagle or the photosynthetic power of plants. So any claim of human superiority must allow for the recognition of excellences in nonhuman species, even for some excellences that are superior to their corresponding human excellences. In fact, it demands that recognition.

Moreover, if the claim of human superiority is to have any moral force, it must rest on nonquestion-begging grounds. Accordingly, we must be able to give a nonquestion-begging response to the nonanthropocentric argument for the equality of species. Yet for any such argument to be successful, it would have to recognise the intrinsic value of the members of nonhuman species. Even if it could be established that human beings have greater intrinsic value, we would still have to recognise that nonhuman nature has intrinsic value as well. So the relevant question is: How are we going to recognise the presumably lesser intrinsic value of nonhuman nature?

Now if human needs, even nonbasic or luxury ones, are always preferred to even the basic needs of the members of nonhuman species, we would not be giving any recognition to the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature. But what if we allowed the nonbasic or luxury needs of humans to trump the basic needs of nonhuman nature half the time, and half the time we allowed the basic needs of nonhuman nature to trump the nonbasic or luxury needs of humans. Would that be enough? Certainly, it would be a significant advance over what we are presently doing. For what we are presently doing is meeting the basic needs of nonhuman nature, at best, only when it serves our own needs or the needs of those

we are committed to or happen to care about, and that does not recognise the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature at all. A fifty-fifty arrangement would be an advance indeed. But it would not be enough.

The reason why it would not be enough is that the claim that humans are superior to nonhuman nature no more supports the practice of aggressing against the basic needs of nonhuman nature to satisfy our own nonbasic or luxury needs than the claim that a person came in first in a race would support the practice of aggressing against the basic needs of those who came in second, third, fourth, and so on to satisfy the nonbasic or luxury needs of the person who came in first. A higher degree of merit does not translate into a right of domination, and to claim a right to aggress against the basic needs of nonhuman nature in order to meet our own nonbasic or luxury needs is clearly to claim a right of domination. All that our superiority as humans would justify is not meeting the basic needs of nonhuman nature when this conflicts with our nonbasic or luxury needs. What it does not justify is aggressing against the basic needs of nonhuman nature when this conflicts with our nonbasic or luxury needs.

Now it might be objected that my argument so far presupposes an objective theory of value which regards things as valuable because of the qualities they actually have rather than a subjective theory of value which regards things as valuable simply because humans happen to value them. However, I contend that when both these theories are defensibly formulated, they will lead to the same practical requirements.

For consider. Suppose we begin with a subjective theory of value that regards things as valuable simply because humans value them. Of course, some things would be valued by humans instrumentally, others intrinsically, but, according to this theory, all things would have the value they have, if they have any value at all, simply because they are valued by humans either instrumentally or intrinsically.

One problem facing such a theory is why should we think that humans alone determine the value that things have? For example, why not say that things are valuable because the members of other species value them? Why not say that grass is valuable because zebras value it, and that zebras are valuable because lions value them, and so on? Or why not say, assuming God exists, that things are valuable because God values them?

Nor would it do simply to claim that we authoritatively determine what is valuable for ourselves, that nonhuman species authoritatively determine what is valuable for themselves, and that God authoritatively determines what is valuable for the Godhead. For what others value should at least be relevant data when authoritatively determining what is valuable for ourselves.

Another problem for a subjective theory of value is that we probably would not want to say that just anything we happen to value determines what is valuable for ourselves. For surely we would want to say that at least some of the things that

people value, especially people who are evil or deficient in certain ways, are not really valuable, even for them. Merely thinking that something is valuable doesn't make it so.

Suppose then we modified this subjective theory of value to deal with these problems. Let the theory claim that what is truly valuable for people is what they would value if they had all the relevant information (including, where it is relevant, the knowledge of what others would value) and reasoned correctly.<sup>37</sup> Of course, there will be many occasions where we are unsure that ideal conditions have been realised, unsure, that is, that we have all the relevant information and have reasoned correctly. And even when we are sure that ideal conditions have been realised, we may not always be willing to act upon what we come to value due to weakness of will.

Nevertheless, when a subjective theory of value is formulated in this way, it will have the same practical requirements as an objective theory of value that is also defensibly formulated. For an objective theory of value holds that what is valuable is determined by the qualities things actually have. But in order for the qualities things actually have to determine our values, they must be accessible to us, at least under ideal conditions, that is, they must be the sort of qualities that we would value if we had all the relevant information and reasoned correctly.<sup>38</sup> But this is just what is valuable according to our modified subjective theory of value. So once a subjective theory of value and an objective theory of value are defensibly formulated in the manner I propose, they will lead us to value the same things.<sup>39</sup>

Now it is important to note here that with respect to some of the things we value intrinsically, such as animals and plants, our valuing them depends simply on our ability to discover the value that they actually have based on their qualities, whereas for other things that we value intrinsically, such as our aesthetic experiences and the objects that provided us with those experiences, the value that these things have depends significantly on the way we are constituted. So that if we were constituted differently, what we value aesthetically would be different as well. Of course, the same holds true for some of the things that we morally value. For example, we morally value not killing human beings because of the way we are constituted. Constituted as we are, killing is usually bad for any human that we would kill. But suppose that we were constituted differently such that killing human beings was immensely pleasurable for those humans that we killed, following which they immediately sprang back to life asking us to kill them again.<sup>40</sup> If human beings were constituted in this way, we would no longer morally value not killing. In fact, constituted in this new way, I think we would come to morally value *killing* and the relevant rule for us might be 'Kill human beings as often as you can.' But while such aesthetic and moral values are clearly dependent on the way we are constituted, they still are not anthropocentric in the sense that they imply human superiority. Such values can be recognised from

both an anthropocentric and a nonanthropocentric perspective.

It might be objected, however, that while the intrinsic values of an environmental ethics need not be anthropocentric in the sense that they imply human superiority, these values must be anthropocentric in the sense that humans would reasonably come to hold them. This seems correct. However, appealing to this sense of anthropocentric, Eugene Hargrove has argued that not all living things would turn out to be intrinsically valuable as a nonanthropocentric environmental ethics maintains.<sup>41</sup> Hargrove cites as hypothetical examples of living things that would not turn out to be intrinsically valuable the creatures in the films *Alien* and *Aliens*. What is distinctive about these creatures in *Alien* and *Aliens* is that they require the deaths of many other living creatures, whomever they happen upon, to reproduce and survive as a species. Newly hatched, these creatures emerge from their eggs and immediately enter host organisms, which they keep alive and feed upon while they develop. When the creatures are fully developed, they explode out of the chest of their host organisms, killing their hosts with some fanfare. Hargrove suggests that if such creatures existed, we would not intrinsically value them because it would not be reasonable for us to do so.<sup>42</sup>

Following Paul Taylor, Hargrove assumes that to intrinsically value a creature is to recognise a negative duty not to destroy or harm that creature and a positive duty to protect it from being destroyed or harmed by others. Since Hargrove thinks that we would be loath to recognise any such duties with respect to such alien creatures, we would not consider them to be intrinsically valuable.

Surely it seems clear that we would seek to kill such alien creatures by whatever means are available to us, but why should that preclude our recognising them as having intrinsic value any more than our seeking to kill any person who is engaged in lethal aggression against us would preclude our recognising that person as having intrinsic value? To recognise something as having intrinsic value does not preclude destroying it to preserve other things that also have intrinsic value when there is good reason to do so. Furthermore, recognising a *prima facie* negative duty not to destroy or harm something and a *prima facie* positive duty to protect it from being destroyed or harmed by others is perfectly consistent with recognising an all-things-considered duty to destroy that thing when it is engaged in lethal aggression against us. Actually, all we are doing here is simply applying our Principle of Human Defence, and, as I have argued earlier, there is no reason to think that the application of this principle would preclude our recognising the intrinsic value of every living being.

In sum, I have argued that whether we endorse an anthropocentric or a nonanthropocentric environmental ethics, we should favour a Principle of Human Defence, a Principle of Human Preservation, and a Principle of Disproportionality as I have interpreted them. In the past, failure to recognise the importance of a Principle of Human Defence and a Principle of Human Preservation has led philosophers to overestimate the amount of sacrifice required of humans.<sup>43</sup> By contrast, failure to recognise the importance of a Principle of Disproportionality has led philosophers to underestimate the amount

of sacrifice required of humans.<sup>44</sup> I claim that taken together these three principles strike the right balance between concerns of human welfare and the welfare of nonhuman nature.

Of course, the practical implications of these three principles would include proposals for conserving existing resources, particularly nonrenewable resources, proposals for converting to renewable resources, proposals for redistributing resources to meet basic needs of both humans and nonhumans, and proposals for population control, all implemented principally by educational changes and by changes in the tax and incentive structures of our society. In the longer work from which this paper is drawn, I go on to discuss these practical proposals in more detail. In this paper, what I have sought to do is provide the nonanthropocentric and anthropocentric grounding for such proposals in a common set of conflict resolution principles that are required for achieving environmental justice.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See Passmore 1974 and Devall and Sessions 1985.

<sup>2</sup> See Taylor 1986 and Bookchin 1991. It is also possible to view Passmore as pitted against Taylor and Bookchin as pitted against Sessions, but however one casts the debate, those who defend an anthropocentric ethics are still opposed to those who defend a nonanthropocentric ethics.

<sup>3</sup> My reconciliation project contrasts with Bryan Norton's (Norton 1991). While Norton's reconciliation project seeks to achieve a reconciliation at the level of practical policies, mine seeks a reconciliation at the level of general principles as well. While Norton's reconciliation project tends to exclude deep ecologists, like George Sessions, and biocentric egalitarians, like Paul Taylor, from the class of environmentalists that he is seeking to reconcile, my reconciliation project explicitly includes them.

<sup>4</sup> See Taylor 1986, pp. 129-135 and Routley and Routley 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Assuming God exists, humans might also be better off if they could retain their distinctive traits while acquiring one or another of God's qualities, but consideration of this possibility would take us too far afield. Nonhuman animals might also be better off if they could retain their distinctive traits and acquire one or another of the distinctive traits possessed by other nonhuman animals.

<sup>6</sup> I am assuming here that either we treat humans as superior overall to other living things

or we treat them as equal overall to other living things. Accordingly, if there is no self-evident or nonquestion-begging grounds for claiming that humans are superior overall to other living things, then, I claim that we should treat humans as equal overall to all other living things.

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I will follow the convention of excluding humans from the class denoted by 'animals'.

<sup>8</sup> By human ethics I simply mean those forms of ethics that assume without argument that only human beings count morally.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, one might contend that no principle of human defence applied in human ethics because either 'nonviolent pacifism' or 'nonlethal pacifism' is the most morally defensible view. However, I have argued elsewhere (Sterba 1992) that this is not the case, and that still other forms of pacifism more compatible with just war theory are also more morally defensible than either of these forms of pacifism.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of basic needs, see Sterba 1988 pp.45-50.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to recognise here that we also have a strong obligation to prevent lifeboat cases from arising in the first place.

<sup>12</sup> Notice that this is not an argument that since the members of other species aren't sacrificing for us, we don't have to sacrifice for them, but rather an argument that since the members of other species are not sacrificing for us, we don't have to sacrifice our basic needs for them. An analogous principle holds in human ethics.

<sup>13</sup> The Principle of Human Preservation also imposes a limit on when we can defend nonhuman living beings from human aggression.

<sup>14</sup> This principle is clearly acceptable to welfare liberals, socialists, and even libertarians. For arguments to that effect, see Sterba 1988. See also the special issue of the *Journal of Social Philosophy* (Vol. XXII No.3) devoted to my book, including my 'Nine Commentators: A Brief Response'.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, libertarians have claimed that we can recognise that people have equal basic rights while failing to meet, but not aggressing against, the basic needs of other human beings. However, I have argued at length that this claim is mistaken. See the references in the previous note.

<sup>16</sup> It should be pointed out that although the Principle of Disproportionality prohibits aggressing against the basic needs of animals and plants to serve the nonbasic needs of humans, the Principle of Human Defence permits defending oneself and other human beings against harmful aggression of animals and plants even when this only serves the nonbasic needs of humans.

<sup>17</sup> It might be objected here that this argument is still speciesist in that it permits humans to aggress against nonhuman nature whenever it is necessary for meeting our own basic needs or the basic needs of humans we happen to care about. But this objection surely loses some of its force once it is recognised that it is also permissible for us to aggress against the nonbasic needs of humans whenever it is necessary for meeting our own basic needs or the basic needs of humans we happen to care about.

<sup>18</sup> Aldo Leopold's view is usually interpreted as holistic in this sense. Leopold wrote 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.' See Leopold 1949.

<sup>19</sup> For a defender of this view, see Taylor 1986.

<sup>20</sup> I am assuming that in these cases of conflict the good of *other* human beings is not at issue. Otherwise, as we have already noted, other considerations will apply.

<sup>21</sup> For example, it is now quite clear that our war with Iraq could have been avoided if early

on we had refused to support the military buildup of Saddam Hussein.

<sup>22</sup> Where it most likely would be morally required is where our negligent actions have caused the environmental problem in the first place.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) inspired this view.

<sup>24</sup> Callicott 1980.

<sup>25</sup> Sagoff 1984.

<sup>26</sup> Warren 1983; Callicott 1989, Chapter 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Realities for the 90's*, p. 4

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>29</sup> Sagoff 1984, pp. 301-5.

<sup>30</sup> I think there is an analogous story to tell here about 'domesticated' plants.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, if we permitted farmland and grazing land to return to its natural state, certain wild animals will surely benefit as a result, but why should we be required to favour the interests of these wild animals over the interests of farm animals, especially when favouring the latter serves our own interests as well? For further discussion, see Gruzalski 1983.

<sup>32</sup> Rolston 1988, pp. 66-8; Bookchin 1991, p. xxxvi.

<sup>33</sup> See the discussion of possible grounds of human superiority in Taylor, pp. 135-152 and in Norton 1987, 135-150.

<sup>34</sup> This is clearly true for welfare liberals and socialists, and it can even be shown to be true for libertarians because most failings to meet the basic needs of others really turn out to be acts of aggressing against the basic needs of others. See note 14.

<sup>35</sup> This is not an argument that any degree of preference for humans is acceptable, if the members of other species express the same degree of concern for their own members, but rather that this degree of preference for humans (failing to meet the basic needs of the members of other species in order to meet human needs) is acceptable if the members of other species express the same degree of concern for their own members.

<sup>36</sup> The same holds true in human ethics where most of the ways that we have of preferring our own nonbasic needs over other humans actually involve aggressing against those needs to meet our own nonbasic or luxury needs rather than simply failing to meet them. See note 34

<sup>37</sup> I am assuming here that part of what is required for reasoning correctly is that the reasoning be done in a nonquestion-begging way.

<sup>38</sup> I'm assuming that objective value theorists would want to incorporate a condition of accessibility into their accounts. It is difficult for me to conceive what would be the point of a value theory for humans without such a condition.

<sup>39</sup> Subjective and objective theories of value have tended to highlight different features of a defensible theory of value. A subjective theory of value stresses that what is valuable for us must be accessible to us. An objective theory stresses that what is valuable for us depends not just on us but on the qualities of things in the world.

<sup>40</sup> One might object here that if humans immediately came back to life, they would not have been 'killed'. Possibly, but what if they came back to life five minutes later or ten minutes later or fifteen minutes later... In my judgment, a more telling objection is that creatures who came back to life in this way would no longer be humans. But irrespective of whether they are humans, given their constitution, they would favour the new moral rule about killing. And this is my point – that moral rules depend on one's constitution. Of course, nothing hangs on accepting this example. For my purposes, it suffices to recognise that our aesthetic judgments depend on the way we are constituted.



<sup>41</sup> Hargrove 1992, p. 147ff.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 151

<sup>43</sup> For example, Baird Callicott (1980) had defended Edward Abbey's assertion that he would sooner shoot a man than a snake .

<sup>44</sup> For example, Eugene Hargrove argues that from a traditional wildlife perspective, the lives of individual specimens of quite plentiful nonhuman species count for almost nothing at all. See Chapter 4 of Hargrove 1989.

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