The Moral Standing of Nonhumans

So far I have confined the basis of the argument to human interests. If the interests of future humans, including those whom we could bring into existence, are taken into account, there is already a formidable case for the conservation of natural resources, wildlife, wilderness and ecosystems, as also for population policies allowing people to have what they need if their lives are to be worthwhile. But perhaps not only humans are entitled to moral consideration. Perhaps some nonhumans, or even nonhuman nature in general, are of moral relevance. There again, perhaps some nonhumans, or some states of nonhumans, are of value in their own right. These are the questions to be tackled in the present chapter.

As Kenneth Goodpaster has observed, the question of the scope and limits of moral consideration is not to be confused with that of moral significance. An answer to the first question commits nobody to any particular view about the relative importance of one set of claims or interests over another. The question of moral significance is a subsequent question, and though it surfaces from time to time in the current chapter, a fuller treatment is postponed to the chapter following. Yet the answers to the first question can throw light on the second, particularly if they include a theory of intrinsic value. For, once we know the basis of a thing’s value, we can begin to compare that value with the value of other states or beings, and to consider priorities.

The present investigation has a bearing at once on applied ethics, normative ethics and meta-ethics. Thus if some animals’ interests are to be taken into account, there is an extra ground for preserving their habitats. Normative theory is also affected, for we should be maximizing the satisfaction not just of human needs but, perhaps,
some animals’ needs too. But this is only possible if, at the level of meta-ethics, the concept of moral consideration is taken to allow the interests of nonhumans to count. In theory the meta-ethical question, ‘Can x be morally considered?’ is distinct from the normative question, ‘Should x be morally considered?’ In a similar spirit Feinberg tries to keep separate the questions, ‘Can animals have rights?’ and ‘Do animals have rights?’ But, as Goodpaster points out,2 they are closely related; and, although he accepts too readily that meta-ethical beliefs may be tailored to normative ones, it is certainly not easy to see how, once it is acknowledged that x is a possible object of beneficence, the claim that x should be taken into account beneficently should be resisted, unless the analogies between it and accepted cases of items having moral standing are very weak.

Though rights have just been mentioned, the current investigation (and, in general, the current volume) does not concern the location of rights. For even if only some humans bore rights, or even if nothing at all bore rights, it would still be possible that humans or other animals or plants deserved moral consideration. Rights are not the only basis of moral concern: something can lack rights, yet still have moral standing. Besides, no consequentialist can treat rights as morally basic; such claims as I make from time to time about rights should be construed as being grounded in the good which accrues, or the evil avoided, when rights are recognized and respected. It is in any case in order to search beyond rights to their moral grounds. Moreover rights-talk is used in a wide range of senses, depending on whether rights are regarded merely as liberties, or are taken always to be matched by corresponding obligations,4 or are strong grounds against interference,5 or can only be overridden when very great harm would otherwise result,6 or are ‘side-constraints’ not to be overridden at all (except perhaps when they clash with each other).7 Accordingly rights-talk needs its sense to be elucidated before it can be appraised; the range of application varies with the sense employed, and things could well have value without most (or perhaps any) of the senses of ‘rights’ applying to them.

Sentience and other capacities

Do only humans, then, deserve moral consideration? Indeed do all humans deserve it? As Richard Routley points out,8 a social contract theory would lead us to limit consideration to the contracting individuals: but such theories, as was observed in chapter 6,
improperly omit even those humans who are not in a position to enter into contracts. Similarly, as Geoffrey Warnock remarks, the Kantian position on which only rational agents can be respected is intolerably narrow: this position, after all, omits infants and imbeciles. But if infants and imbeciles are instead included, as they ordinarily are, then it is extremely hard to justify excluding those animals which can, like them, suffer pain and frustration.

Most infants and many mentally defective people, certainly, share capacities (in the sense of potentials) for rationality, rule-following and self-determination lacked by most, if not all, nonhuman animals; and these are capacities essential to humanity in the sense that the lack of them from most members of a species shows it not to be human, and at the same time inessential to other species. This fact may not be without its significance, as an organism’s inherited capacities (essential ones included) are, it is reasonable to maintain, determinative of its good as a member of its kind; and the potentials of a chimpanzee or a dolphin are different from those of humans. Indeed it seems reasonable to hold that a worthwhile life involves the ability to exercise the essential capacities of one’s species. If so, then human individuals with the capacities mentioned need to be allowed to develop them or they will be deprived of their good. Yet all this, though important for value-theory, is beside the present point. For some imbeciles, infant ones included, lack these potentials, yet do not for that reason forfeit moral consideration. And if they do not, then those animals which can likewise suffer pain and frustration must also have moral standing, quite apart from the case for it which might be based on their having some capacities in common with most humans and some distinctive ones of their own.

Sentience, then, seems sufficient to qualify an organism for moral consideration. This could be because, as hedonists claim, pleasure is the sole good and pain the sole evil; if the balance of pleasure over pain is to be maximized, all creatures susceptible to either must be taken into account. But it is reasonable to hold that there are other goods, among them the ability to exercise self-determination, and other essential (but not in all cases distinctive) human capacities: for these, sentience is doubtless in most cases necessary, but the value of autonomy, etc., does not seem to depend on the pleasure which it may give rise to. Nevertheless pleasure and pain remain of positive and negative value in themselves, even if they are not the sole good and evil, and accordingly the (current) susceptibility to them is indeed sufficient for being morally considered. Thus most
nonhuman animals have moral standing alongside humans, even if, perhaps, there are differences of value in the goods and evils to which they are liable.

Tom Regan’s view of the importance of sentience\textsuperscript{10} is that it is a logically necessary condition of a being having or leading one form of life that is better or worse for the being in question, one involving pleasure and pain. The mere value of pleasure and pain, he holds, does not explain why it is wrong to treat beings susceptible to them only as a means: intrinsic value really attaches to beings which are the subjects of a life which can be more or less valuable from their point of view. Regan’s position presupposes that only individual organisms have intrinsic value, not their experiences or dispositions; and he considers that only the possession of intrinsic value makes it wrong for a being to be treated as a means. (Having intrinsic value is itself suggested as a necessary and sufficient condition of having irreducible moral rights; but, as I have indicated, the question of rights is not one which I shall here be considering.)

But if pleasure is of intrinsic value and pain of intrinsic negative value, the susceptibility to each of them \textit{does} explain the wrongness of being treated solely as a means: or rather does explain it if it is allowed that we are obliged, in nonmarginal cases, to maximize intrinsic value. For if the organism in question were treated solely as a means, its liability to pain or pleasure would be totally disregarded: whereas if it is taken into account, the organism will not be treated as if it were of no moral relevance at all — indeed it will sometimes make a crucial difference — even if its importance is sometimes outweighed by that of other beings. Accordingly there is no need to regard only individual organisms as possessed of intrinsic value, rather than their states and experiences: the moral relevance of these beings can readily be maintained in the absence of this stipulation.

As to the suggestion that the necessary and sufficient condition of being an organism not to be treated only as a means (and thus of being of moral relevance in one’s own right) lies in being the subject of a life which can be better or worse from one’s point of view, I believe that there is here a sufficient condition of moral relevance but perhaps not a necessary condition. This is certainly so if the proposed criterion is taken in a strong sense and requires the organism to have a concept of its own identity and future. Peter Singer sometimes\textsuperscript{11} uses this form of the criterion to mark off most humans and a few animals (beings whose deaths he believes to be intrinsically evil) from infants, some imbeciles and most nonhuman
animals (to kill which is wrong, if at all, because of effects on other beings). But he is rightly concerned about the pains and pleasures of many creatures which do not satisfy the criterion in this form as well as about those which do.

The criterion also admits of a weaker sense which requires neither a concept of the self nor a sense of the future: something could be a subject of a life which can be better or worse from its point of view so long as it is conscious and has attitudes of gladness or frustration to what befalls it. All such organisms have a good of their own (to be glad or frustrated about), even perhaps some which do not have pleasant or painful sensations. (This could be true of some insects, fish or molluscs.) Now if whatever is susceptible to satisfaction and frustration merits moral consideration, then the Regan criterion, even in this weaker sense, marks a sufficient condition of moral relevance. But it is far from self-evident that it marks a necessary condition. For it is plausible that many creatures which do not satisfy it have interests and are capable of being benefited, and it is not obviously absurd to hold that whatever has interests falls within the class of ‘moral patients’. Accordingly the interests criterion now falls due for consideration.

Regan’s view about the scope of interests in one recent paper was that only conscious or potentially conscious beings have interests: thus human foetuses may qualify, but trees are explicitly excluded. But Regan may here be using ‘interests’ in a special sense — he glosses ‘having interests’ as ‘having desires, needs, etc.’ — a sense other than that of ‘having a good of one’s own’: for in subsequent and previous writings he has held that nonconscious beings can have a good of their own, and has criticized Feinberg for claiming to show that they cannot.

At all events this restrictive view of the scope of interests is adopted without qualification by Feinberg, who thus excludes ‘mindless creatures’ from the class of things with interests, though he is not altogether consistent about this. Feinberg is of the clear view that interests require desires or aims on the one hand, and cognition on the other. He also holds that when we speak of the good or the needs of plants, the functions which they need to discharge ‘are assigned by human interests, not their own’. On the other hand, in an earlier passage concerning the conditions for a thing to have a good of its own, he lists as one of the alternative requirements for having a conative life, which may in turn qualify a thing for having a good of its own, ‘latent tendencies, direction of growth and natural fulfillments’ (sic). But plants manifestly satisfy
all the elements of this requirement. Moreover, as Goodpaster
observes, it is absurd to hold that humans have assigned to trees the
functions of growth and maintenance (or, we might add, many
others). Indeed the needs of trees have not altered since long before
humans existed on the planet.

I have assessed Feinberg's views elsewhere,16 and here wish only
to reaffirm the obvious truth that trees and other plants have a good
of their own (a good which often conflicts with the interests of
people). Accordingly neither sentience, consciousness or cognition
are necessary for needs and interests. Having a good of their own,
trees can be beneficiaries of human action, and are thus at least
serious candidates for moral standing. As Goodpaster realizes, their
lack of enjoyments, etc., may well make them of less moral
significance than are sentient creatures, and we may take it that this
is because less that is of value can befall them. But he concludes at
this stage that, however slight their moral significance may be, all
living things are 'morally considerable'.

But is being a possible beneficiary or having interests a sufficient
condition of being deserving of moral consideration? Goodpaster’s
main argument for holding that it is so, apart from his replies to
objections, lies in the necessary connection between beneficence
and morality. This connection granted, the range of application of
each is likely to be the same. This argument is reaffirmed in stronger
form in a reply to W. Murray Hunt.17 Beneficence and non-
maleficence, he there points out, are central in morality. Accordingly
as inanimate objects have no interests and cannot be benefited or
harmed, they cannot be given moral consideration: but as living
creatures do fall within the scope of beneficence, so they do within
that of morality. This argument does indeed show this in the weak
sense that moral consideration for the good of plants is not a
conceptual impossibility, but does not show that the interests of
plants ought to be taken into account. If so, an obstacle for the
belief that plants merit moral consideration has been removed, but
the belief itself, despite beginning to look less eccentric, has not
been established.

Goodpaster also has a subsidiary argument, designed to explain
reluctance to accept his conclusion. There is probably a noncon-
tingent connection between theories of value and conceptions of
'moral considerability'. In particular the sentience criterion of the
latter ties in with a hedonist theory of value. Thus anyone who
accepts, as many people do, that only enjoyment is of positive
intrinsic value and only pain is of negative intrinsic value is unlikely
to accept that items not susceptible to either are morally to be considered. This is, I think, true; but to support his own conclusion further from this angle Goodpaster would need to put forward a cogent view of the value which attaches to nonsentient life or its states. For even if hedonism is rejected, what replaces it need not repose value in plants, or be echoed by a theory which accords them moral consideration. (In fact Goodpaster has more recently located value in the biosphere as a whole;\textsuperscript{18} attention will be given later to such holistic theories.)

\textit{Environmental concern}

Nevertheless the dealings of humans with nonconscious items in their environment do, as Regan points out, have their 'moral dimensions'.\textsuperscript{19} (Thus it is widely believed to be wrong to eliminate a species, whether its members are conscious or not, or to destroy trees or forests without good cause; and there are also objections to tampering with some inanimate natural objects, as when mountains are quarried or rivers dammed.) Regan accordingly depicts an 'environmental ethic', and urges in its defence that the most common alternative ways of accounting for moral concern in these matters do not suffice to do so. In the environmental ethic which Regan presents it is acknowledged not only that some nonhumans have moral standing\textsuperscript{20} but also that all conscious and some nonconscious beings have too. The same beings would be held to have value independently of any awareness or appreciation of them or interest in them on the part of any conscious being.\textsuperscript{21} (Though Regan here employs the phrase 'inherent value', I shall continue to use 'intrinsic value', as 'inherent value' is also used in a contrasting sense, as will be seen below.) This value would be consequential on their other natural properties.

Regan is right to hold that the alternatives which he considers cannot account for environmental concern. Thus the argument that despoliation of nonconscious nature (e.g. unchecked strip-mining) is wrong because it makes its agents ruthless towards humans (or other animals) is as vulnerable as its empirical premise — that these effects do actually ensue. Besides, the objections to such practices would remain even if there were no such effects.

Another argument which Regan considers turns on the ideal of not destroying anything unthinkingly or gratuitously. Plundering the environment, so goes the argument, is wrong because it violates this ideal. Another form of this argument is put forward by Passmore,\textsuperscript{22}
who holds that our reactions to such deeds are explained by our disapproval of vandalism and wanton destruction, and that accordingly no such environmental ethic as Regan here proposes is required. The answer to this argument is that if vandalism is wrong then either, as I have claimed elsewhere,\textsuperscript{23} some evil effect is perpetrated and there is a loss of value to the world, or, as Regan holds, the object which is destroyed must itself have value. Thus the vandalism theory is parasitic on an account of value which it does not supply. It does not follow, as Regan seems to think, that objects which can be vandalized must have intrinsic value,\textsuperscript{24} for their value could depend on states of conscious perceivers. But the possibility that some of them or their states have intrinsic value remains an open one.

The next argument is that what makes it wrong to extirpate whole species or destroy forests is the adverse effect of doing so on the balance of pleasure over pain. As Regan acknowledges, this theory is not human-centred, as it can take into account animal pains and pleasures: and if it is sufficiently broadened as to include human interests and the interests of sentient beings in general, it accounts for more of our judgements in environmental matters than Regan allows. Thus it is important to preserve many plants and animals for reasons of scientific research, for recreation, retreat and the enjoyment of natural beauty in their habitats, and to retain as wide a gene-pool as possible for the sake of medicine and agriculture. These reasons are well presented by Passmore\textsuperscript{25} and drawn just from human interests. If the interests of nonhuman animals are also taken into account, there are also reasons against practices such as clear-cutting forests, as the Routleys and Singer have contended.\textsuperscript{26}

But any such theory is open to a difficulty noticed by Laurence H. Tribe: if these interests only are taken into account, it would often be justified to replace natural trees with plastic ones.\textsuperscript{27} Many of the functions of trees can be carried out by alternative plants with greater practical benefits to humans; and though the reasons just given require the preservation of some trees, they may well not be conclusive in all cases. Indeed if we reason from pleasures rather than interests, fashion could lead to plastic trees being preferred and thus dictate their universal installation. The appalling implication that natural environments should be replaced by plastic ones justifies, in Regan's view, rejecting the theory.

A way forward consists in rejecting the hedonism which is the focus of Regan's protests, and adopting a theory in which the development of humans' aesthetic capacities counts among intrinsic
goods, and also the development of individual wild animals after their kinds in their natural surroundings. But even such a broadened consequentialist theory seems at risk of allowing too much replacement of the natural by the plastic, and to be in danger of yielding this implication for as long as trees are only considered instrumentally and accorded no value of their own.

The fourth argument considered by Regan is based on the premise that parts of the natural environment symbolize cultural values which cannot satisfactorily be expressed without them, and that the loss of significant scenes and places diminishes ourselves. This consideration is held by Mark Sagoff to override utilitarian considerations. A similar argument has also been presented about historical landmarks by M. P. and N. H. Golding. The symbolic value of natural objects probably does explain a good deal of our concern to preserve them: but the argument is, as the Goldings acknowledge about theirs, grounded in human interests — interests which cannot claim immunity from comparison with other such interests. This, indeed, makes the argument a salutary one, as far as it goes: for it reminds anyone who assesses actions by their consequences that they must not neglect the effects which an action has, both upon the agent and upon others, through its psychological or cultural significance as a symbol.

But the argument is defective for reasons which include those given by Regan. Firstly there are difficulties in identifying which values should be expressed: manifestly our culture embodies diverse valuations of wilderness itself (to cite the conflict of values most immediately relevant to the matter in question), and it is not clear that we should prefer the values of the cultural elite who value it highly to those of the rest. Secondly the argument is powerless where the local culture (or the culture of the time) does not call for the preservation of nature. Indeed the argument could actually in some circumstances enjoin the manufacture and preservation of plastic forests. Besides this, the argument is no stronger than the potency of the symbolism of wild nature: even if for some people a river symbolizes freedom or the hills integrity, it is difficult to believe, except in cases of historical landmarks, that the symbolism will be perennial or persistent. There again, many of the species liable to be extinguished through the unintended side-effects of human activity have not sufficiently obtruded themselves upon human consciousness as to enter into our systems of self-expression at all; but their members can scarcely lack all standing simply because we have failed to notice them.
The four arguments which Regan considers, then, do not seem to account for certain widespread moral judgements, and do further suggest that trees have a value which in some cases is not purely instrumental. But this does not show that they (or their flourishing) have intrinsic value, and thus constitute a wholly independent object of moral concern. Much less does it show that inanimate natural objects have such a value: indeed about objects such as rocks and rivers I follow Goodpaster in holding that things which lack a good of their own cannot be the objects of moral consideration (as opposed to the creatures which live in or around them), or have intrinsic value. Some theory, certainly, is needed to explain the non-instrumental value which we attach to a variety of natural objects. But it is still an open question whether this value lies in the desirability of diversity, or in the value of species, rather than in the value of their individual members, or indeed in the value of the experience of wild things not made or controlled by people. There is also the alternative theory to consider that what is of intrinsic value is not individual organisms but entire ecosystems, each regarded as a community, or the biosphere, or the planet, and that the value of individual natural objects consists in their participation in the value of a greater whole.

The value of diversity

The value of diversity is a longstanding theme in our culture, a theme the history of which has been traced in A. O. Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being.* The more diverse a world is, it has often been held, the better. In ecological connections this is an attractive principle: thus it accords a measure of value to those unimposing species which often turn out to play an indispensable role in an ecosystem, and still more to ecosystems which are internally diverse and which often turn out to be more stable for that reason than simpler ones. But this could all be accounted for by the importance of the preservation of a system of interdependent creatures, rather than by the value of diversity itself; and the reason for the importance of such systems being preserved could be the benefit of the sentient beings involved in it (sometimes including humans), or the external benefits to humans of the system remaining intact (e.g. a large gene-pool, recreation, scope for scientific research). Moreover where diversity is valued independently of these grounds, it is plausibly of value because of the enjoyment it affords to those able to experience it. Once it is granted that the enjoyment of sentient
creatures is desirable for its own sake, and that it is in general increased by the experience of diversity both in the worlds of nature and of human culture, it may readily be acknowledged also that this, together with the range of worthwhile activities which it facilitates, is why value is attached to diversity.

This account of the value of diversity cannot be accused of being human-centred, as it includes the value of some of the experiences and activities of nonhumans. Moreover it does not follow from it that there is nothing inherently bad about the loss of a species; for there may well be other reasons to think that there is something bad about this, lying either in living species, or in their members, or in states of their members. But diversity extends indifferently to the inanimate as well as to the animate, and I cannot see that there is any reason to accept that the more kinds there are, of whatever nature, the better. I have explored the question of the value of diversity further elsewhere; as to the effects of diversity, Passmore has argued persuasively that they are a mixture of good and bad. So we may accept that diversity is valuable by making our lives, and those of our fellow-creatures, fuller and richer, without being of value in itself; and proceed to the question of the value of living species.

The value of species

Ample reasons why the elimination of a species is usually contrary to human interests have been given above: to these Peter Singer adds that there would often also be consequential harm to members of other nonhuman species. But, as he points out, species are not, as such, conscious entities. Can species be said to have interests? According to Singer it follows that they cannot. Though I reject his reasoning, I believe that the conclusion that species lack interests is correct, at least if it means that a species has no interests over and above those of its members. Viewed abstractly, a species has interests no more than abstract classes have in general; and, though species are often viewed concretely, as the current population of the species, the interests which may then be spoken of reduce to those of the current members without remainder. Where the interests of further species are at stake, it is of course often desirable that there should be, for example, grass or legumes, without it mattering which individual organisms stay alive; but in questions of intrinsic value, the value would have to turn on that of particular individuals, or at
least on particular flourishing states being attained by some individuals or other.\textsuperscript{34}

But it is important not to forget the future members of a species. In some small measure this consideration is already implicit in the mention of the interests of the current members. For, among sentient organisms, it is often in the interests of those currently alive that their immediate successors should thrive. Yet, as was remarked in chapter 7 about humans, this point on its own hardly justifies preserving a species in perpetuity. The real question concerns whether the future members of nonhuman species will have value and should be considered in the present, in any way analogous to that which was claimed in that chapter for future people. The answer here must be that where the existence or the flourishing of future beings would have value, and we can facilitate or prevent it, we must take it into account. But the elimination of a species guarantees that it will have no future members; and many species are precisely threatened with extinction, either through the direct effects of human action or through reluctance to forestall the effects of pollution, the loss of natural habitats or other harmful trends. Therefore we must take into account the value of the future members of these species.

This is to say nothing about the extent of their moral significance, which might well easily be overridden in many cases. (Nor is it to declare that future nonconscious organisms are of intrinsic value, as the issue of the value of present ones remains unresolved.) But where members of these species (or their states) have value, it is to say that their future members have moral standing, including those possible future members the existence of which we can veto altogether. And in this area, as in that of future people, we could have duties regarding future creatures without owing the duties to particular ones or even knowing their identity. Thus for practical purposes we can speak of the value of the continued life of a species, although this value in fact hangs on that of the several present and future members.

\textit{Conscious and nonconscious life}

Now to see how far such commitments would extend, we need to resolve the issue of the intrinsic value of nonconscious living organisms. But before that can be done it is necessary to assess a rival theory of Frankena and Singer. William Frankena follows C. I. Lewis in calling ‘inherent value’ the value which an object has
through its ability to contribute to human life by its presence, and contends that this is the kind of value which attaches to things whether alive or not which are interesting to watch or study, or beautiful to contemplate, or which heal us when we are with them. C. I. Lewis' example is a painting. Frankena contrasts such inherent value with instrumental value, and applies the notion to natural as well as cultural items which benefit those who observe or contemplate them.\(^3\) His example is the value which birds have for bird-watchers. (As birds are sentient, he would doubtless allow them intrinsic value too, but he would not say the same for plants or rocks.)

Peter Singer holds a similar view, expressed in different terms. Singer considers the suggestion of Val Routley that the destruction of a species is analogous to that of a great work of art, and that some of the 'immensely complex and inimitable items produced in nature' (Singer's quotation) have a non-instrumental value, just as a great painting has value 'apart from the pleasure and inspiration it brings to human beings'.\(^3\) He replies by asking how it can be shown that a work of art such as Michelangelo's *Pieta* has value 'independently of the appreciation of those who have seen it or will see it'. It is unfortunate that Singer appears to imply that, not being non-instrumental, the value of the *Pieta* is merely instrumental, for his views suggest that he could agree with Frankena in holding its value not to be instrumental either, but inherent. But in any case his view is that its value depends on the possibility of its being perceived and enjoyed, and he sustains this view with a thought experiment not unlike that of Richard Routley, and a variant recently put forward by myself.\(^3\) We imagine the last sentient being on earth making a bonfire of all the paintings in the Louvre. As long as the possibility of a visit from interstellar tourists is excluded, Singer does not hold that anything wrong is done. (He should perhaps exclude the likelier possibility also that the agent would have enjoyed the paintings later, by stipulating that the last sentient being knows that he or she is shortly to die.) If so, the value of works of art is inherent rather than intrinsic. Now if we also rule out the possibility that the interests of the dead, or of God, make a difference, it is hard to conclude that the act is wrong; and this conclusion is fortified by the reflection that inanimate objects have no good of their own. Works of art thus have inherent rather than intrinsic value, and if there really is an analogy between them and species (or their members), as has also been suggested by Stanley Benn,\(^3\) then the analogy, *pace* both Benn and Val Routley, supports no stronger conclusion than
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this about any of the items concerned.

My agreement with Frankena and Singer applies not only to works of art but also to natural objects like rivers and rocks. Thus both the symbolic significance which they sometimes have and their curious diversity turn out to be facets of their inherent value. Nor should I dispute that very many living species, whether sentient or nonsentient, are possessed of inherent value also: an example is supplied by what Regan pleasantly calls 'pleasures rooted in real redwoods'. This may seem to clash with Mary Midgley's point, mentioned in chapter 4, that wild nonhuman creatures must be held either to have no point or value or to have a point which is quite alien to human purposes.39 But the conflict is only apparent. As far as any intrinsic value which they may have is concerned, Midgley's view may be accepted; but granted her observation that we can derive pleasure and renewal from that which is wild and alien to our purposes, it follows that in any case the wild and alien creatures concerned have inherent value. What is clear, however, is that it does not follow from their having inherent value that this is the only value which they have. Singer is easily able to arrive at his view that this is the extent of their value, holding as he does that trees only have interests and needs in much the same sense as that in which cars do.40 But cars lack natural fulfilsments and, except in an artificial sense, direction of growth; trees, by contrast, have a good of their own, quite independent of that of people or other purposers.

Accordingly, although Goodpaster's reminder that plants have a good of their own does not establish that they have moral standing, there is some analogy between them and items which are widely agreed to have such standing, consisting precisely in their having interests and in the qualities and capacities which make this true. Thus the capacities for growth, respiration, self-preservation and reproduction are common to plants and sentient organisms (as also to many unicellular organisms). So there is an analogical argument for holding that all the organisms concerned not only can but also do have moral standing. There is, in fact, a qualification to make, as the analogical argument applies only to organisms with interests; and though sentient organisms whose flourishing was in the past clearly still have interests as long as they have any prospect of consciousness, the same cannot be said, in general, of nonsentient beings. For the interests of these beings lie in the fulfilment of their capacities, and once this fulfilment is in the past and decay sets in (often through the flourishing of other organisms) their interests decline and vanish. Only what retains a potential for realizing the
generic good of its kind has interests and is valuable, even if the above argument is accepted; and accordingly it may well be that living organisms are not valuable as such, but that what is valuable is their flourishing or their capacity for flourishing after the manner of their kind, for as long as such a capacity can to any extent be sustained.

But can the argument be allowed to proceed even this far? For its implications seem devastating, and there are in any case disanalogies to consider. The implication which Goodpaster considers of respecting all life is that one cannot live on these terms, and Passmore actually accepts a corresponding objection to Schweitzer's view that all life merits reverence.41 This implication is not greatly weakened by the qualification about organisms which are past their prime, as millions of others remain to be considered. The objection may thus be expressed as follows. If plants (or bacteria) have any more-than-negligible moral significance, then in their millions their interests must sometimes outweigh those of individual humans or other sentient beings; but this flies in the face of our reflective moral judgements, and should thus, short of compelling reasons, be rejected.

To this, however, there is a reply. Moral standing should not, as we have seen, be confused with moral significance; and the unacceptable conclusion is implied only by claims about the moral significance of plants and bacteria, not by claims about their moral standing. For they could have a moral standing and yet have an almost infinitesimal moral significance, so that even large aggregations of them did not outweigh the significance of sentient beings in cases of conflict. It could be that their moral significance only makes a difference when all other claims and considerations are equal (or nonexistent). Yet, as Goodpaster says, as long as plants have moral standing, it is worth bearing this standing in mind as a 'regulative consideration' which should at least ideally be taken into account. (In the actual world, the inherent and instrumental value of plants and generally of nonconscious organisms will quite often outweigh other moral considerations, and will constitute the main reasons against, for example, eliminating a species. But the intrinsic value of healthy plants could still add slightly to those considerations.)

The argument thus survives this objection, but it is no stronger than its analogical basis allows, and at this point the disanalogies between conscious and nonconscious organisms become important. The limited nature of the interests of the latter has already been noted. Moreover they cannot be pained or gladdened, satisfied or
frustrated; and, except for the most primitive, they have no prospect of ever evolving into anything which could bear characteristics of this kind. There again they are not the subjects of a conscious point of view, and theories which base value on choices or preferences between living the life of one creature and the life of another are apt to accord them no value whatsoever.\textsuperscript{42} Besides this, they are not in any morally interesting sense agents, even though causally their activity is vital for those beings which are so.

But how much do the disanalogies count for? Doubts were expressed in chapter 7 about theories which rest values on preferences; and the disanalogies do not annul the interests which seem to qualify plants (and the rest) for intrinsic value. The importance of the disanalogies seems rather to concern moral significance. Thus if pain and frustration constitute what is centrally of negative value, but plants and bacteria are susceptible to neither, then relatively little of negative value can befall them: and this suggests that relatively little of positive value can befall them either. If so, their moral significance will indeed be very slight, but this does not begin to show that they lack moral standing.

Even if plants have only slight moral significance, their moral standing would account for Benn’s remark that ‘if the well-being of persons could not be protected anyway, it would certainly be better to leave behind a world of living things than a dead world’, and also for what Stephen Clark calls ‘our distress at the destruction of a living tree’,\textsuperscript{43} a distress which, Clark holds, ‘is not merely at our loss of pleasure in its beauty’. To test whether this is so, we need to imagine a state of affairs in which there are no sentient organisms, so that no one is impoverished by the tree’s destruction. We thus imagine that all sentient beings, human and nonhuman, are doomed to imminent nuclear poisoning, and that this is known to the last surviving human. In ‘The Good of Trees’ I asked whether the survivor does wrong if he chops down with an axe ‘the last tree of its kind, a hitherto healthy elm, which has survived the nuclear explosions and which could propagate its kind if left unassaulted’. Most people who consider this question conclude that his act would be wrong. I still believe that this is a valid test, which survives the objections about method which I there considered; and, though I grant that stray intuitions may need to be reined in by a consistent moral theory, in this case intuitions confirm a theory which already has some independent support. But it should be acknowledged that the destruction of the elm is seen in a worse light than might otherwise prevail because it involves the elimination of a species.
and guarantees that there will be no future elms. Destroying without good reason a tree of a plentiful species might be regarded as somewhat less serious, though still, doubtless, as wrong.

Yet even so, the case of the destruction of the last elm, where the existence of future elms is at stake, is still a fair test of whether elms are of intrinsic value: and the judgement that they are helps to explain our objections to the elimination of species (and to letting them die out) as well as our regrets at individual uprootings, as expressed by Clark. Further, though a species does not constitute a moral individual, the case of the last elm shows how the extinction of a species is worse than the killing of individual members. (I am not suggesting that eliminating a species is always wrong, but rather that, whatever the inherent or the instrumental value of the members, it always constitutes a significant intrinsic evil which needs to be weighed up against the benefits which may derive from it. Nor *a fortiori* am I suggesting that it is always wrong to tear a leaf from a tree, but I do consider Frankena to be mistaken when he implies that there is no harm in doing so whatever. 44)

*Holism*

On the theory which has been advanced, then, the class of things with moral standing does not extend beyond that of individual beings with a good of their own. Thus when species count it is because of their individual members, whether actual present ones or future ones which could live and flourish unless deprived in the present of the necessary ancestors. This type of theory, however, is likely to be criticized by those who see such positions as unduly atomistic, a mere extension of moral standing from moral agents *via* other humans to nonhuman animals and individual plants, rather than to the biotic community, or to nature as a whole. As Frankena remarks, phrases such as ‘everything’ and ‘all life’ may be taken either distributively or collectively; and he observes that Holmes Rolston 45 both pleads the intrinsic value of ‘every ecobiotic component’ and commends the enlargement of the moral focus ‘not only from man to other ecosystemic members, but from individuals of whatever kind to the system, . . . (a) community (which) holds values’. Also Goodpaster himself in ‘On Being Morally Considerable’ takes seriously the possibility of the biosphere having moral standing, 46 and in his later ‘From Egoism to Environmentalism’ contends that the enlargement of the class of morally considerable beings cannot without arbitrariness be tied to individuals but must
extend to systems as well: only thus can we escape an ‘individualistic’ model of thought and the ‘concentric reasoning’ of humanism enlarged. Sympathy for such a move has been expressed too by Clark, and has been encouraged by the claim, made in a scientific journal, that the biosphere may be regarded as an organism.

There are two strands in this accumulating holistic view, one which conceives of the biosphere as a community and the other which conceives of it as an organic whole. Both may be traced to the writings of Aldo Leopold. Leopold advocates a ‘land ethic’ in which the scope of ethics is enlarged; and sometimes he interprets this as the enlargement of the moral community. ‘All ethics so far evolved rest on a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts . . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.’ The suggestion here is that whenever two or more natural things are interdependent, they bear mutual obligations, and that this is the case within the community which Leopold calls ‘the land’.

This suggestion has been severely criticized by Passmore, even though he accepts that all the elements listed by Leopold form part of an ecological ‘life-cycle’. But this sense of ‘community’, he holds, fails to generate ethical obligation. For obligations to be generated there must be two conditions which are not satisfied in the ecological case: common interests among the members, and the recognition of mutual obligations. But the second requirement begs the question against Leopold, and is in any case too strong; thus people in a community can have obligations without there being recognition of these obligations on all sides, and indeed it cannot be necessary that obligations should be recognized for them to exist. As to the first requirement, the suggestion that common interests are shared, for example, by humans and bacteria cannot be denied unequivocally, and is in some ways quite cogent.

Leopold’s suggestion has been elaborated by J. Baird Callicott, who stresses that it is absurd if taken to imply that trees, rocks and rain have duties and are subject to ethical limitations. These limitations apply only to moral agents, but these agents, who are aware of mutual obligations in the human community, should recognize that they are also members of the interdependent biotic community, and accept parallel obligations to its other members. Similarly Clark urges us to recognize the claims of other creatures in ‘earth’s household’, the land community.

But, as Benson has written in reply, ‘not every relationship of
mutual dependence automatically carries with it a moral relationship.\textsuperscript{54} This is clearly true where that on which we depend is inanimate and lacks a good of its own. Clean air should be preserved not for its own sake but for that of living creatures. Where living creatures with a good of their own are concerned, there is, as we have seen, the possibility of a moral relationship (of human to fellow-creature), but even this need not amount to a matter of obligations to particular plants or animals. We are obligated, I should grant, to take their interests into account, but this holds good of creatures whether they and we are interdependent or not. Conversely interdependence does not proportionately strengthen our obligations in this regard, but rather strengthens the argument from human interest to preserve the systems of which they form part. Thus to represent the biosphere as a moral community serves as an evocative metaphor of the consilience of self-interest and morality, but does not add extra grounds for respect to the ‘ecobiotic components’.

Leopold has also written that ‘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’.\textsuperscript{55} This passage could be construed as expressing a concern for all the members of the biosphere, considered distributively, in accordance with the obligations internal to a community. But it seems to go further and make the criterion of right conduct the preservation of the biosphere as a whole. This is unlikely to mean the maximizing of intrinsic value within it, for talk of its ‘integrity, stability and beauty’ suggests otherwise. More probably it concerns upholding its systems and its diversity. A similar view is taken by Thomas Auxter,\textsuperscript{56} who assesses the rights of individuals and species by their contribution to the richness of the biosphere, to the greater development of systems, and to their members’ mutual co-adaptation.

Now the stability of ecosystems is clearly crucial for the maintenance of all life; no new ethical basis is required to support it. Co-adaptation is desirable for the same reasons. Diversity is, as we have seen, of inherent value, and this accounts for our preference for rich natural systems. Neither the preservation of ecosystems, however, nor diversity are of intrinsic value, and their conjunction is not guaranteed to foster what is such, or even to cohere with it. Thus the death of a quarter of the human population would not prejudice ecosystems or the diversity of species; and though the loss of individual diversity would be inestimable (and Auxter could perhaps deplore it as such) I doubt if this would infringe Leopold’s
criterion. To put matters in a different way, if the whole biosphere is regarded as having moral standing, then there can be a conflict between maximizing its excellences and maximizing the intrinsic value of its components.

But the biosphere will only have intrinsic value or moral standing if, as Frankena puts it, it has ‘a value that is not reducible to the value in or of the lives or beings of the entities which make it up’. Like Frankena, I can see no reason to accept this view. Certainly everything which is of value (and located anywhere near our planet) is located in the biosphere, and the systems of the biosphere are necessary for the preservation of all these creatures. But that does not give the biosphere or its systems intrinsic value. Rather it shows them to have instrumental value, since what is of value in its own right is causally dependent on them. As to the biosphere as a whole, with all its richness and beauty, those features which it has but which its components lack suggest that its value is inherent. Admittedly if all its conscious members expired, it would retain its beauty, but there would be value in this beauty only as an object of contemplation either by further conscious beings or by ourselves as we envisage its lonely grandeur.

I cannot therefore accept the full claims about intrinsic value of the ‘deep, long-range’ environmental movement; more particularly I do not find intrinsic value in inanimate beings (or in each and every animate one), or again in ecosystems, the biotic community or the biosphere. Nor can I accept the mystical metaphysics which sometimes accompanies these judgements of value, a metaphysics on which the distinctions between individual organisms pale before the unity of the whole, of which moral agents and other apparent individuals are mere manifestations. Such talk is parasitic on belief in the substantiality of the ‘ecobiotic components’, and neither their reality nor their value can be disregarded at the stage when thought has reached the level of the biosphere as a whole, not at any rate with consistency intact.

Similarly there seem no grounds to accept what Henry Byerly has characterized as the ‘Holist Design Principle’, which ‘tells us not to interfere with natural systems because this would be to act contrary to the general design of nature’. Seriously to hold that ‘Nature knows best’ (Barry Commoner’s Third Law of Ecology) is to abandon the attempt to do what is best in the light of the best evidence about the consequences: and there is no reason to suppose either that nature intends otherwise (or indeed intends anything), or that God prefers the nonrational zones of creation to proceed
unaffected by rational creatures. Nor could it be so, since rational creatures are part of nature, and survive by employing their naturally endowed capacities for the purposive modification of their natural surroundings. Nor, *a fortiori*, should we with Leopold make the stability, integrity and beauty of the biosphere the sole criterion of morality. With Byerly I recognize the need for an alternative principle which exhorts caution over random changes to crucial natural systems without prohibiting action to make the world a better, or a tolerable, place.

**Values and valuers**

Nevertheless by accepting the intrinsic value of some nonconscious entities I am clearly rejecting most forms of the plausible view that what is of value is necessarily valued by some conscious subject. (Not all forms need to be rejected, as this doctrine could concern just those subjects who value what there is good reason to value: but I need to reject any form of it in which what conscious subjects prefer determines what is valuable, rather than *vice versa.* This doctrine has been termed the ‘no detachable values assumption’ by Richard and Val Routley,61 who have effectively criticized the argument that only the interests of valuers, and what promotes those interests, are of value. As they point out, even such an instrumentalist theory of value carries an assumption of its own about what is intrinsically of value: and if such an assumption concerns the interests of a privileged class only and omits other interests, the assumption cannot easily be defended. Doubtless, it may be acknowledged, lines have to be drawn somewhere between what is of value and what is not, and not all delimitations can be ‘chauvinist’; but the line which is actually drawn must nevertheless be a defensible one. The Routleys’ critique of the ‘no detachable values’ assumption also serves to show that any theory of value, however instrumentalist in tenor, must recognize intrinsic value somewhere, or there is nothing which gives anything of value its point. Accordingly there is nothing mystical or irrational in talk of intrinsic value, or attempts to locate it. Such attempts must, as we have seen, begin with agreed cases and then proceed outwards through a consideration of analogies and disanalogies, as has been attempted above.

By this method I have arrived at a position at once deeper than the shallow environmental movement and shallower than the mystical depths of the deeper movement of Naess’ characterization.
In brief, I have arrived at a position on which whatever has interests of its own has moral standing and on which the realization of those interests has intrinsic value. This view may be accused alike of chauvinism by holists and of irrationality by adherents of the growing consensus view that all and only the sentient have moral standing. It may also be resisted by those who hold that value is too far detached from valuers. But to these positions I have given my responses already.

Finally the position adopted should be related to the Judaeo-Christian theistic tradition. What is asserted coheres well with the Old and New Testaments, and conflicts only with such later adherents of the tradition as Aquinas, Descartes and Kant. Frankena, in fact, gives several positions which a theist might hold in matters of moral standing, some of which would not cohere with the position presented above. On his first alternative all that matters morally is whether we are benefiting or harming God. On this view, strictly interpreted, only states of God are of intrinsic value, whereas states of creatures are only of derivative value, the extent of which depends on their effects on God. This alternative, as Frankena sees, may well be rejected by those who hold that God cannot be harmed or benefited: but his second alternative, on which what matters is obeying God's commands or loving what he loves, has a parallel upshot. For once again only the fulfilment of God's will is of intrinsic value, and the states of creatures have value only insofar as they contribute to it. Frankena's third alternative is that what matters in morality is promoting 'the glory of God' in a sense irreducible to that of the preceding alternatives, a sense which Frankena does not supply. His final alternative splits into two: either the wholehearted love of God is morally basic, and love of one's neighbour is subordinate to it; or the love of God and of neighbour are co-ordinate and each basic in their own right.

Now according to Frankena, only if the second variant of the final alternative is adopted is anything but God or his states or will of intrinsic value. Yet the third alternative, as he describes it, need not be interpreted as excluding this. Thus the glory of God could consist in the flourishing of his creatures, and this could be what counts primarily in morality. At any rate a theist is free to adopt such a view, which coheres with the position of this chapter. It may, of course, be asked why the fulfilment of creatures' interests redounds to God's glory: but if ex hypothesi this happens to be his creative purpose, the answer is to hand. Love of God could still supply an extra motive for love of fellow creatures, but it would not
be the only route to such a love. The remaining question is whether creatures have an additional, inherent value through the creator's enjoyment of them. This could be so, as long as God's enjoyment is not treated as an episode. But it would not affect the grounds of human action. For whatever has inherent value of this sort also has it because of the possible enjoyment of creatures; and though it could persist when all conscious creatures have perished, no extra reason is provided in the form of preserving things for God to enjoy, as his enjoyment is timeless, and unaffected by change, decay or death. I conclude that the above discussion is fully in line with biblical talk of God's love for his creatures and injunctions to do his will.

NOTES

3 'On Being Morally Considerable', p. 312.
5 Ibid. p. 102.
9 *The Object of Morality*, New York: Methuen, 1971, pp. 150f. Much the same applies to the egoistic position, with which Narveson has recently found himself in sympathy; for on that position, as Regan has observed, there are no grounds whatever to give consideration to those infants and imbeciles who have no friends or family to care about their fate. See Jan Narveson, 'Animal Rights', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 1977, 161—78, and Tom Regan, 'Narveson on Egoism and the Rights of Animals', ibid. 179—86.
11 In 'Killing Humans and Killing Animals', *Inquiry*, 22, 1979, 145—56, and in 'Not for Humans Only: The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues', in K. E. Goodpaster and K. M. Sayre (eds),
12 Ibid. p. 205.
13 Regan contends, against Feinberg, that in one ordinary sense of
'interests' it is not impossible for nonconscious beings to have interests,
Sorts of Beings Can Have Rights', in *Southern Journal of Philosophy*,
15 Ibid. p. 49.
16 Robin Attfield, 'The Good of Trees', *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 15,
1981, 35—54. (This paper was in fact accepted for publication some
time before Goodpaster's paper was drawn to my attention.)
Everything: A Reply to W. M. Hunt', *Environmental Ethics*, 2, 1980,
281—4.
18 In 'From Egoism to Environmentalism', in Goodpaster and Sayre
(eds), *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century*, 21—35, pp. 28—33;
also in 'On Being Morally Considerable', p. 323.
20 The phrase 'moral standing' is modelled on the title of Christopher
Stone's book *Should Trees Have Standing?*, (Los Altos, Cal.: William
Kaufman, 1974), in which Stone argues that some natural objects
should be accorded legal rights.
23 'The Good of Trees', section II.
National University Press, 1974; Singer, 'Not for Humans Only', p. 198.
27 Laurence H. Tribe, 'Ways not to Think about Plastic Trees', *Yale Law
28 'On Preserving the Natural Environment', *Yale Law Journal*, 84, 1974,
205—67.
29 'Why Preserve Landmarks? A Preliminary Inquiry', in Goodpaster and
30 *The Great Chain of Being*, Harvard, Mass., Harvard University Press,
1936.
31 In 'The Good of Trees', section II.
32 *MRN*, 119—21.
33 'Not for Humans Only', p. 203.
34 For another view see Stephen Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals*,


Cf. the theory of Singer, ‘Not for Humans Only’, p. 199f; also that of Roupas, discussed in chapter 7 (above).


‘On Being Morally Considerable’, p. 323.


*MRN*, p. 116.


55 A Sand County Almanac, pp. 224f; cited by Frankena, 'Ethics and the Environment', p. 12 and p. 20, n. 21; and by Goodpaster, 'From Egoism to Environmentalism', p. 21.
56 'The Right not to be Eaten', Inquiry, 22, 1979, 221—30, pp. 222f, and p. 228f, n. 2.
57 'Ethics and the Environment', p. 17.
61 'Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism', in Goodpaster and Sayre (eds), Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century, 36—59; see p. 42, and the discussion at pp. 42—52, and p. 58f, n. 13. For a contrary view, see Robert Elliot, 'Why Preserve Species?', in Environmental Philosophy, (see chapter 4, n. 47, above), 8—29, pp. 18—21. I favour a more objectivist view than the Routleys or Elliot.
62 Frankena, 'Ethics and the Environment', p. 8. See also my criticism in chapter 4 (above) of the Routleys' understanding of theistic ethics.