CONSTRUCTING AN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

IV.A The Broader, Biotic Community

16. PREVIEW

On reflection, I find it as odd to think that the plants have value only for the happiness of the dusky-footed woodrats as to think that the dusky-footed wood-rats have value only for the happiness of humans.1

John Rodman

Cows scream louder than carrots.2

Alan Watts (explaining why he is a vegetarian)

We begin with a discussion of the nineteenth-century environmental movements in the United States called conservationism and preservationism. These movements were influential in the thinking of major environmental writers such as Aldo Leopold. Moreover, contemporary philosophers such as J. Baird Callcott, Bryan G. Norton, and Anthony Weston employ the terms “conservationism” and “preservationism” in their work. To understand what they are talking about, we need some historical background.

In the context of developing appropriate attitudes toward the earth, Anthony Weston says,

We need to think of the earth itself in a different way: not as an infinite waste sink, and not as a collection of resources fortuitously provided for our use, but as a complex system with its own integrity and dynamics, far more intricate than we understand or perhaps can understand, but still the system within which we live and on which we necessarily and utterly depend. We must learn a new kind of respect.3

If being more mindful of, and attentive to, the way we interact with and depend on nature is, as Weston claims, the minimum required by an environmental ethic, what else is required? For answers, we examine “the land ethic,” Deep Ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism. In this larger discussion in Section IV.A, we read works by legal theorist Christopher Stone, philosophers Kenneth Goodpaster and Paul Taylor, and the originator of the land ethic, Aldo Leopold (Essays 18, 17, 19, and 21). They raise such questions as the following: Is sentience the correct standard for determining who or what has moral standing or inherent value? Do trees have rights? Do wildflowers have inherent value? Are ecosystems, rather than the individuals who make up such systems, the real sources of inherent value? Even though Leopold is chronologically earlier than Goodpaster, Stone, and Taylor, some believe his ideas are a more radical departure from traditional humanistic ethics than those of Goodpaster, Stone, and Taylor.4 So our classification in this part is based on the logical progression of ideas rather than historical order.

HISTORICAL MOVEMENTS

The conservation movement had scientific roots. Some of its leaders, such as Gifford Pinchot (1865–1914), came from different fields
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of study, such as forestry. The emphasis of the movement was on wise management of resources over a long period of time.

Pinchot favored commercial development of the U.S. forest reserves for present and future American citizens. In his book, *The Fight for Conservation*, he maintained the following:

The first great fact about conservation is that it stands for development. There has been a fundamental misconception that conservation means nothing but the husbanding of resources for future generations. There could be no more serious mistake. Conservation does mean provision for the future, but it means also and first of all the recognition of the right of the present generation to the fullest necessary use of all the resources with which this country is so abundantly blessed.

Conservation demands the welfare of this generation first, and afterward the welfare of the generations to follow. The first principle of conservation is development, the use of the natural resources now existing on this continent for the benefit of the people who live here now.

Pinchot further emphasized that forest resources should not fall into the hands of the powerful few, corporations, for example, but should be used to make homes for all American citizens. Pinchot, who in 1905 became head of the newly established U.S. Forest Service, once told the Society of American Foresters, "The object of our forest policy is not to preserve the forests because they are beautiful . . . or because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness . . . but . . . the making of prosperous homes." As a spokesperson for the conservationist movement and a supporter of Theodore Roosevelt's policies, he said, "If we succeed, there will exist upon this continent a sane, strong people, living through the centuries in a land subdued and controlled for the service of the people, its rightful masters, owned by the many and not by the few." 

Pinchot was opposed by the preservationist movement, headed by John Muir (1838–1914), the founder of the Sierra Club. Muir wanted to preserve the wilderness for aesthetic and spiritual reasons:

Watch the sunbeams over the forest awakening the flowers, feeding them every one, warming, reviving the myriads of the air, setting countless wings in motion — making diamonds of dewdrops, lakes, painting the spray of falls in rainbow colors. Enjoy the great night like a day, hinting the eternal and imperishable in nature amid the transient and material.

For Muir, nature provides an experience of the sacred or holy. The experience is not simply one of inspiration, but one of recognition of the divine in nature. As Muir once reported his experience of a stroll in the woods: "How beautiful and fresh and Godful the world began to appear."

One famous example of the opposition between the conservationists and the preservationists is the controversy over the Hetch Hetchy Valley in California. Muir and his followers fought for the protection of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park. The city of San Francisco wanted to dam the area, thus flooding the park, and construct a reservoir. Pinchot, whose colleagues contemptuously referred to the preservationists as "nature lovers," threw his support behind James R. Garfield, Secretary of the Interior, who approved the city's request to build a dam. Both Pinchot and Muir brought pressure to bear on President Theodore Roosevelt, who in the end supported Pinchot.

Despite their differences, it can be argued that both traditions, conservationism and preservationism, were anthropocentric. If so, whether Hetch Hetchy Valley is used as a water supply for human beings or as a source of peak experiences for humans, its value lies in human use. Nonetheless, one can find in the writings of John Muir the kind of life no one could imagine. Anyhow, a veil covering a carnation—independent value, pantheistic view, independent of a person and his follower—later advocates such as Callicott and Algar, such as Christopher Stone: nature has value that we should acknowledge as way as parents who argues that trees sue in court (even as his behalf) for their rights. This section is to investigate attempting to connect that of nature.

THE CONTINUATION

Christopher Stone, University of Southern California, An Important Treatise on the Rights of Nature, (Essay 18). Stone development as a moral concern entities as we person or empathize with to Stone, "each one and those of him." As we knew we drew was very done, says Stone, entities in the indeed as object exist only for increasingly has been "making fi aliens, women society), the ins
of John Muir the idea that nature has value independent of human beings: "Rocks have a kind of life not so different from ours as we imagine. Anyhow their material beauty is only a veil covering spiritual beauty—a divine incarnation—instonation."11 Although this independent value may not be independent of a pantheistic view of nature, it is nevertheless independent of human beings.12 As such, Muir and his followers influenced Aldo Leopold and later advocates of the land ethic such as J. Baird Callicott and advocates of the rights of trees such as Christopher Stone. Callicott claims that nature has value in itself or for its own sake, that we should value nature in much the same way as parents value their children. Stone argues that trees and streams should be able to sue in court (or have guardians sue on their behalf) for their own injuries. One task of this section is to investigate the various grounds for attempting to establish the independent value of nature.

THE CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION

Christopher Stone, a law professor at the University of Southern California, wrote an important treatise entitled Should Trees Have Standing? (Essay 18). Stone sees the history of moral development as an extension of the scope of our moral concern to more and more beings and entities as we progressively are able to identify or empathize with them. Originally, according to Stone, "each man had regard only for himself and those of a very narrow circle around him."13 As we have seen, the circle that Aristotle drew was very small indeed. What we have done, says Stone, is to view many beings and entities in the world as less than persons, and indeed as objects or things in the world that exist only for the use of people. Our law increasingly has reflected a shift from this view by "making persons of children...prisoners, aliens, women (especially of the married variety), the insane, Blacks, foetuses, and Indianans."14 Many authors in this book argue against the notion that nature exists solely for the use of human beings. Some believe that such a denial points the way to expanding the circle of right-holders to include environmental "objects" such as trees and streams.

Stone suggests that as we become more sensitive, we add more and more previously rightless entities to the list of persons. His remarks on sensitivity and empathy raise questions about the role of rational argument in ethics. On what basis is the law "making persons"? In Stone's view, it is only when we perceive nature as like us that we will be able to generate the love and empathy for the environment that in turn will enable us to attribute rights to it. Does such a thesis imply that rights should be attributed to all things cute and cuddly? Suppose we identify with human fetuses. Do they have rights on that account? Must E.T. be rightless if we do not empathize with him (it)? Is there anything in the universe we will not add to the list of persons assuming we can empathize with it? Should our capacities for empathy be a determining factor in ascertaining what sorts of things possess rights? Suppose some cannot identify with Jews, gypsies, or people of another color?

Justice William O. Douglas, in the U.S. Supreme Court case Sierra v. Morton, 1972, cited Stone's book in support of his dissenting opinion that "Contemporary public concern for protecting nature's ecological equilibrium should lead to the conferral of standing upon environmental objects to sue for their own preservation."15 In this landmark case, the Sierra Club tried to prevent Walt Disney Enterprises from building a ski resort in the Mineral King Valley adjacent to Sequoia National Park. The case was not decided on the relative merits of ski resorts versus natural beauty. Rather, it was decided on the issue of standing to sue. "Whether a party has a sufficient stake in an otherwise justiciable controversy to obtain judicial resolution of that controversy is what traditionally has been referred to as the ques-
tion of standing to sue." 16 The law requires that the party seeking review must itself have suffered an injury or itself have been adversely affected. The Court decided in favor of Disney and against the Sierra Club. After all, it is hard to say that the Sierra Club's members suffered an injury simply because others like to ski. Mineral King Valley might have received legal consideration if trees and streams had standing to sue for their own preservation and/or injury. Much of Stone's essay is a plea for a liberalized domain of legal standing. Since trees cannot initiate proceedings on their own behalf, Stone recommends a guardianship approach similar to the one we have now with respect to incompetent human beings, such as the profoundly retarded and young children. Incompetent humans have legal rights even if they are unable to claim them for themselves, such as rights to proper medical treatment.

As recently as June 12, 1992, in Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife, the U.S. Supreme Court decided an important environmental case on the basis of the standing-to-sue doctrine articulated in Sierra v. Morton. As a result, the Court did not address substantive environmental issues such as alleged violations of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 by U.S.-agency-funded projects in foreign countries and whether the Endangered Species Act applies only within the borders of the United States.

In 1978, the Carter administration issued a regulation saying that the Endangered Species Act did apply to American projects abroad. In 1983, Ronald Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, reversed that policy. Several environmental groups sought to challenge the policy continued by George Bush's Secretary of the Interior, Manuel Lujan. Two members of the Defenders of Wildlife, Joyce Kelly and Amy Skilbred, submitted affidavits claiming that certain federally supported projects threatened an endangered Egyptian crocodile and the Asian elephant and leopard in Sri Lanka. The information in the affidavits was based on Kelly and Skilbred's professional interest in the areas and their visits to the sites of the federal projects.

The Court said, "We shall assume for the sake of argument that these affidavits contain facts showing that certain agency-funded projects threatened listed species. . . . They plainly contain no facts, however, showing how damage to the species will produce 'imminent' injury to Miss. Kelly and Skilbred." 17 In making their case that Kelly and Skilbred were not injured, the Court weighed heavily the fact that the environmentalists were unable to say exactly when they would return to the areas. Despite the fact that a civil war was going on in Sri Lanka, thus hampering one plaintiff's ability to be precise about her future plans to return to the area, the Court demanded detail on future conduct.

In Lujan, the Court admitted that "when the plaintiff is not himself the object of the government action or inaction he challenges, standing is not precluded, but it is ordinarily 'substantially more difficult' to establish." 18 In Stone's view, the crocodiles, elephants, and leopards should have been the plaintiffs in this case, but, of course, they do not have standing to sue. In our efforts to think hard about how to achieve better environmental policies in the United States, we need to consider whether changing the standing-to-sue doctrine will bring about significant gains.

In a move similar to Peter Singer's claim that species membership as such is irrelevant to moral standing, Kenneth Goodpaster rejects sentience as the criterion that must be met in order for a being (or entity) to count for something, morally speaking. Singer believes that the species one happens to be, like the race or the sex one happens to be, is an arbitrary characteristic that has no moral significance. What matters, in his view, is whether a being can suffer. But Goodpaster, like the Deep Ecologists, and others such as Paul Taylor, thinks that seeing sentience as all important is as arbitrary as claiming the same for membership in...
Homo sapiens. Goodpaster says, "Nothing short of the condition of being alive seems to me to be a plausible and nonarbitrary criterion [of moral considerability]." He adds, "This criterion, if taken seriously, could admit of application to the biosystem itself." In making this claim, Goodpaster seems to be moving in the direction of what is called ethical holism.

Roughly speaking, holism is the view that the biosphere as an interconnected whole has moral standing. Such a view is often attributed to Aldo Leopold and is explicitly endorsed by his intellectual descendant, J. Baird Callicott. Paul Taylor's views must be distinguished from those of the holists. Taylor describes his view as biocentric egalitarianism. According to Taylor, all living beings have equal inherent worth in that each living being is a goal-directed system pursuing its own good. Respect for nature is respect for these pursuits. However, Taylor's biocentric ethic, in contrast to Callicott, is individualistic and not holistic. In Taylor's view, according to reviewer T. L. S. Sprigge, "Total eco-systems only matter because individuals find their good within them; there is no over-all value of the whole, since the whole (it is claimed) is pursuing no good of its own."

Taylor, as Sprigge points out, is prepared to push his individualistic biocentrism pretty far. For example, it is just as important that nonconscious individuals such as plants achieve their goals as it is that a conscious individual should. Plants do not have to be conscious in order to be valued for their own sake or in order to be as valuable as human beings. Taylor says, "[t]he killing of a wild-flower, then, when taken in and of itself, is just as wrong, other-things-being-equal, as the killing of a human."

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) is a major figure in the emergence of contemporary ecological/environmental ethics. His ethical views, often referred to as "the land ethic," are found mainly in his book A Sand County Almanac. In this influential work, Leopold tells the story of Odysseus, who, after returning from the wars of Troy, hanged a dozen female slaves whom he suspected of misconduct. Because Odysseus thought of slaves as mere property, his concept of ethical obligation did not extend to them. He felt that he could dispose of them as he wished. Leopold draws an analogy between the former status of slaves and the current status of land. Land, Leopold argues, should not be viewed as property. His "land ethic" extends moral concern to "soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." Land in Leopold's view is not a commodity that belongs to us, but a community to which we belong. Elsewhere, Leopold refers to the land as an "organism." As might be expected, some expositors of Leopold have emphasized the "community" model and others the "organism" model.

A study of Leopold's work raises a host of important questions. Leopold advocated a harmonious relationship with the land. The land ethic, he said, "changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such." But what does this respect entail? Respect for land, in his view, does not mean leaving it alone, since Leopold believed that we can alter it for the better. "The swampy forests of Caesar's Gaul were utterly changed by human use—for the better. Moses' land of milk and honey was utterly changed—for the worse." In Leopold's view, a harmonious, as opposed to an exploitative, relationship with nature does not imply that humans should refrain from killing animals. As John Rodman characterizes Leopold's view, "it would be pretentious to talk of a land ethic until we have... shot a wolf (once) and looked into its eyes as it died."

Callicott, in his essay "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic" (Essay 22), reads Leopold as intending to extend moral standing to things that are not themselves individual humans or animals. This, according to Callicott, is what is new and radical about
Leopold’s land ethic. “[The] standard modern model of ethical theory provides no possibility whatever for the moral consideration of wholes—of threatened populations of animals and plants, or of endemic, rare, or endangered species, or of biotic communities, or most expansively, of the biosphere in its totality.” Callicott emphasizes Leopold’s call for “respect for the community as such” in the famous characterization of the land ethic (quoted earlier) where human beings are said to be plain members and citizens of the earth.

Not everyone agrees with Callicott that Leopold intended to attribute moral standing to the biosphere as a whole. Bryan Norton, for example, says the following: “That Leopold saw new and grave responsibilities limiting human activities in the modern world of bulldozers and concrete is without question. But whether he saw these obligations as deriving from sources outside of, and independent of, human affairs seems to me doubtful.” Although both Callicott and Norton characterize Leopold’s view as “holistic,” the two could not be further apart on the issue of whether the biosphere as a whole has moral standing or intrinsic value and whether Leopold claimed that it does. The difference is this: By “holism,” Norton means “the interests of the human species interpenetrate those of the living Earth.”

It might be helpful to contrast Norton’s view of holism with our earlier characterization. Earlier, we said that holism is the view that the biosphere as an interconnected whole has moral standing. For Norton, holism is the view that the biosphere is an interconnected whole. As individuals we are part of a larger system and we should value the system, but we value the system from the viewpoint of individuals rather than claiming that the system is the source of independent value. Norton rejects the following dilemma: “either nature is saved for future consumptive purposes or it is saved for itself . . . this reasoning ignores human, nonconsumptive motives for protecting natural ecosystems.”

Calling Leopold an “uncompromising preservationist,” Norton goes on to claim that preservationism is characterized by “the exclusion of disruptive human activities from specified areas” for the purpose of preventing overexploitation and in turn ecological breakdown. “On the grandest scale, [preservationists] pursue . . . the setting aside of large, pristine tracts where the struggle to survive can continue untrammeled by human interference, or as nearly so as possible.” In Norton’s view, whether preservationists are motivated by anthropocentrism or nonanthropocentrism matters little. Nonanthropocentrism, Norton says, “is sufficient, but not necessary, to support preservationism. The preservationist perspective requires no more than a concern for long-term effects of pervasive management on biological diversity.”

The disagreement between the integrator of perspectives, Bryan Norton, on the one hand, and Callicott and his followers, on the other, runs deep. Norton is a pragmatist and would probably agree with the following assessment of Leopold’s work by Anthony Weston: Leopold is “not offering an ethical theory, [but] only a provisional statement of some of the values that ought to find their place in an ecologically intelligent land-use policy.” The values to which Weston refers are integrity, stability, and beauty—the ones expressed in Leopold’s famous maxim “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.” Callicott characterizes Leopold’s maxim as the “summary moral maxim of the land ethic.” For Callicott, Leopold is not simply suggesting some intelligent land-use values; he is asserting a fundamental, if not ultimate, ethical principle that is part of a larger ethical theory, the land ethic.

Callicott’s approach to the land ethic has developed over a long period of time. In 1980, he wrote his provocative “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” in which he argued that animal liberation is not a question of individual animals with its holistic counterpart. Callicott’s maxim or principle expresses “the idea that the community is the right of species, habitats, and biotic communities, or most expansively, of the biosphere in its totality” for the purpose of preventing overexploitation and in turn ecological breakdown. “On the grandest scale, [animal liberationists] pursue . . . the setting aside of large, pristine tracts where the struggle to survive can continue untrammeled by human interference, or as nearly so as possible.” In Callicott’s view, whether animal liberationists are motivated by anthropocentrism or nonanthropocentrism matters little. Nonanthropocentrism, Callicott says, “is sufficient, but not necessary, to support animal liberationism. The animal liberationist perspective requires no more than a concern for long-term effects of pervasive management on biological diversity.”

The implications of this include the claim that an individual may be saved for the biotic good. The notion of the right may be found in a human being might be saved for the biotic good. The notion of the right may be found in a human being might be saved for the biotic good. The notion of the right may be found in a human being might be saved for the biotic good. The notion of the right may be found in a human being might be saved for the biotic good. The notion of the right may be found in a human being might be saved for the biotic good. The notion of the right may be found in a human being might be saved for the biotic good.
animal liberation with its emphasis of the importance of individuals and environmental ethics with its holistic emphasis are based on incompatible philosophies. In the article, he referred to Leopold’s maxim as “the categorical imperative or principle precept of the land ethic.” It expresses “the idea that the good of the biotic community is the ultimate measure of the moral value, the rightness or wrongness of actions.” Callicott interpreted Leopold’s maxim as implying that concern for the biotic system should take precedence over a more traditional concern for individuals. “The land ethic manifestly does not accord equal moral worth to each and every member of the biotic community; the moral worth of individuals (including, N.B., human individuals) is relative, to be assessed in accordance with the particular relation of each to the collective entity which Leopold called ‘land.’

Claims such as the one just given that seem to imply that individual animals may be sacrificed for ecological reasons or that humans might be killed for obstructing a sustainable future, prompted Tom Regan to accuse advocates of the land ethic of environmental fascism—a charge Callicott alludes to in “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic.” Regan says, “The implications of [Leopold’s maxim] include the clear prospect that the individual may be sacrificed for the greater biotic good. . . . It is difficult to see how the notion of rights of the individual could find a home within a view that . . . might be fairly dubbed “environmental fascism.” . . . The rights view cannot abide this position . . . because it denies the propriety of deciding what should be done to individuals who have rights by appeal to aggregative considerations, including, therefore, computations about what will or will not maximally “contribute to the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.” Individual rights are not to be outweighed by such considerations . . . Environmental fascism and the rights view are like oil and water: they don’t mix.”

Callicott now repudiates many of the views he expressed in “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair.” His article “Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again” is his major effort at reconciliation; however, some such effort can be seen in the essay reprinted herein, “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic” (Essay 22). Following Mary Midgley, Callicott talks about ever-widening circles of kinship that eventually embrace the land. However, “the land ethic . . . neither replaces nor overrides previous accretions [inner social circles to which we belong].” In fact, “as a general rule, the duties correlative to the inner social circles to which we belong eclipse those correlative to the rings farther from the heartwood when conflicts arise.”

Norton, in his article reprinted here (Essay 23), says the following of Callicott’s journey: “[T]he upshot is that Callicott advocates allegiance to monistic inherentism in theory, but recognizes that the more intimate obligations of kinship and culture will usually outrank obligations to protect species and ecosystems. If this seems a capitulation to business as usual in environmental ethics, with inherent value reduced to a meaningless slogan, it must in fairness be said that Callicott faces a difficult and apparently destructive theoretical dilemma.” Maximize inherent value and be accused of fascism, or find a way to argue that our obligations to persons as owners of inherent value override our obligations to ecosystems as owners of inherent value.

As a pragmatist in the tradition of Peirce and Dewey, Norton’s method of dealing with issues in environmental ethics is to recognize that multiple values are at stake (rejecting monism) and to try to integrate these values in order to design a workable environmental policy. It is probably not an exaggeration to suggest that pragmatists view philosophical discussions about intrinsic value or inherent value to be a waste of time. Certainly Anthony Weston suggests that philosophical disputes
about intrinsic value might better be replaced by an understanding that the earth is valuable because it is our home. In reply to the pragmatists, Callicott argues that one’s theoretical beliefs matter. It is not enough to simply seek common ground, policy consensus, and workable solutions. Environmental philosophers are needed, he argues, to help “reconfigure the prevailing cultural world view and thus [help] to push general practice in the direction of environmental responsibility.”

NOTES

4. J. Baird Callicott, in correspondence.
9. Ibid., p. 27.
10. Samuel Hays makes a similar point when he says that the crux of the controversy was over two public uses of the area: water supply and recreation. Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency, p. 193.
11. John Muir, To Yosemite and Beyond, p. 113.

18. Lujan, p. 4497.
20. Ibid.
23. This remark is a paraphrase of a point made by Sprigge in “Some Recent Positions in Environmental Ethics Examined,” p. 116.
26. Ibid., p. xxvii.
27. Ibid., p. 240.
33. This point is a paraphrase of a remark made by Norton in a review of J. Baird Callicott’s In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy, Environmental Ethics 13(2) (Summer 1991), 182.

17. On Being Morally Considerable

Kenneth E. Goodpaster

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.

What follows is a proposal about which needs more elaboration than can provide. The question addressed in different articles by G. J. Warnock’s formulation with:

Let us consider the two alternatives which need more elaboration than can provide. The question addressed in different articles by G. J. Warnock’s formulation with:

Modern moral problems arise from the assumption of egoism as its principal distinguishing feature.

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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.

—Aldo Leopold

What follows is a preliminary inquiry into a question which needs more elaborate treatment than an essay can provide. The question can be and has been addressed in different rhetorical formats, but perhaps G. J. Warnock’s formulation of it is the best to start with:

Let us consider the question to whom principles of morality apply from, so to speak, the other end—from the standpoint of the agent, but of the “patient.” What, we may ask here, is the condition of moral relevance? What is the condition of having a claim to be considered, by rational agents to whom moral principles apply? (148)

Modern moral philosophy has taken ethical egoism as its principal foil for developing what can fairly be called a humanistic perspective on value and obligation. That is, both Kantian and Humean approaches to ethics tend to view the philosophical challenge as that of providing an epistemological and motivational generalization of an agent’s natural self-interested concern. Because of this preoccupation with moral “take-off,” however, too little critical thought has been devoted to the flight and its destination. One result might be a certain feeling of impotence in the minds of many moral philosophers when faced with the sorts of issues that question the breadth of the moral enterprise more than its departure point. To be sure, questions of conservation, preservation of the environment, and technology assessment can be approached simply as application questions, e.g., “How shall we evaluate the alternatives available to us instrumentally in relation to humanistic satisfactions?” But there is something distressingly uncritical in this way of framing such issues—distressingly uncritical in the way that deciding foreign policy solely in terms of “the national interest” is uncritical. Or at least, so I think.