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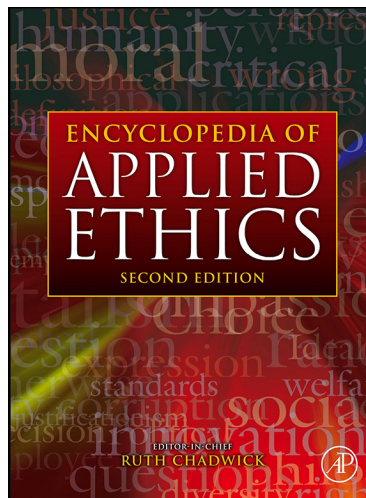
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Anthropocentrism

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Glossary

Biocentrism The ethical belief that all living individual beings have moral value as ends in themselves, rather than as means to human ends.

Ecocentrism The ethical belief that both individuals and whole ecosystems, watersheds, species, the biotic community have inherent value as ends in themselves.

Zoocentrism The ethical belief that some animals warrant moral consideration as ends in themselves, rather than means to human ends.

Ontological In ethics, having to do with how we understand the reality of the world, issues of what things are, how they act, and in what ways they impact other things.

Intrinsic Value rooted in a thing's very existence; value because a thing is, not because it provides something to anyone or anything else.

Moral community The description of entities that are granted moral standing as ends in themselves.

Holistic The ethical belief that all things are part of larger collectives, which in turn demonstrate qualities that are different as a whole than if the qualities of the individuals within were combined.

Utilitarianism The ethical theory that believes an act is right if it results in the greatest good for the greatest many; right action determined by the action's consequences.

Deontology The ethical theory that believes one has a duty and an obligation to act morally according to predetermined moral norms; right action depends on the moral intentions of that action.

Speciesism Discrimination against another species based on the fact that its members are not human.

Sentience The ability to feel both pleasure and pain, the quality of being able to experience suffering.

Emergent A quality that emerges from something complex (a system, a whole) that does not reside in any of its more simplified individual components either in isolation or in addition; emergent properties arise in relationship, rather than in combination.

Ecofeminism The theoretical philosophy and activism that brings together feminism and environmentalism in order to respond to the shared logic of domination that underlies and allows for the discrimination of women and the degradation of nature, as well as all other forms of hierarchical relationships.

Anthropocentrism: What is it?

Anthropocentrism literally means human-centered, but in its most relevant philosophical form it is the ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value. In contradistinction, all other beings hold value only in their ability to serve humans, or in their instrumental value. From an anthropocentric position, humans possess direct moral standing because they are ends in and of themselves; other things (individual living beings, systems) are means to human ends. In one sense, all ethics are anthropocentric, for arguably humans alone possess the cognitive ability to formulate and recognize moral value. This agency places humans at the center of whatever ethical system we devise, and this moral reality drives some scholars to claim that anthropocentrism is the only logical ethical system available to us. But many other scholars argue this circumstance is an ethically uninteresting fact, not a limiting factor in the type of ethical system we devise to help us determine good and bad,

right and wrong. We can accept the limitation of our human lens and still make choices about where we find value in the world. Because we are moral agents, the same cognitive ability that allows us to see the world in comparison to ourselves also allows us to treat with respect, or value as ends in themselves, other things. We can refer to this conception of a human-centered world in which human cognition determines our ethical approach as ontological anthropocentrism. Alternately, the definition of anthropocentrism that understands humans as the sole possessors of intrinsic value is ethical anthropocentrism.

But not all ethical anthropocentrism is the same. From this perspective, one can either view humans in isolation and disregard nonhuman relationships as unimportant for decision making, what we will call narrow anthropocentrism, or one can understand humans in an ecological context, as embedded in and dependent upon myriad relationships with other beings and systems, what we will call enlightened, or broad

anthropocentrism. Ethical anthropocentrism is often a focus in environmental ethics discussions, which unpack our valuation of the natural world in an effort to determine how we ought to live in relation to that world. What do we value in nature (and how do we define nature), why do we value it, and how are these valuations manifest? In this way, environmental ethics discussions are central to environmental policy and decision making, whether motivated by ethical anthropocentrism or by some more inclusive theory.

Perhaps because of the similarity of the words, 'anthropocentrism' is often confused with 'anthropomorphism,' the act of imbuing nonhuman entities with human characteristics, such as square sea sponges that sing, dance, and emote just as human characters would. While mixing the two words might be a simple linguistic error, this conflation might also betray more interesting ethical parallels. For in the same way that ontological anthropocentrism highlights the limitations of our experience, anthropomorphism often demonstrates the human storyteller's attempt to create sympathetic characters that communicate and participate in relationships in the only way the storyteller fully understands, as a human, even if these character lives do not reflect ecological reality. Similarly, many ethicists would argue that narrow anthropocentrism responds to a world that does not exist, because it does not reflect the complex ecological relationships that define and sustain humans. Hence, while both anthropomorphism and narrow anthropocentrism reflect an invented reality, anthropomorphism might also be seen as an attempt to remedy a moral shortcoming by allowing us to relate to nonhuman nature.

Similarly, anthropocentric thinking is sometimes confused with anthropogenic action, human-caused effects on the world. But this mistake, too, might be more ethically interesting than one initially recognizes. Environmental thinkers might argue that anthropocentrism is the root of many of our current, anthropogenic, environmental problems, including issues of climate change and widespread pollution. In fact, some would argue that the origins of environmental philosophy itself lie in our reactions to anthropocentric thinking, filtered through reductionist science, which has defined the Western religious worldview since the Renaissance. The relationship between religion, science, and the environment is the central theme of the seminal essay in environmental ethics, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" by Lynn White Jr., which articulates a link between ethics and ecological degradation. White examines the Judeo-Christian worldview and its impact on the human–nature relationship, then traces a flawed relationship with the natural world to an interpretation of Genesis in which God gives man the natural world for his use. According to White, our anthropocentric relationship with the natural world is responsible for our current environmental crisis;

therefore to mend our ecological problems we must reexamine our worldview, or our religious interpretations. "What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship," (White, 1967: 1205) White explains. "More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one" (White, 1967: 1206). Using the example of St. Francis of Assisi and his "humility – not merely for the individual but for man as a species," White calls for a more inclusive moral community. Ethicists have since taken on his challenge by defining and defending this community in a series of nested responses about who and what might matter morally, and why.

So what role does anthropocentrism play in a discussion about environmental ethics beyond its place as the other against which proper environmental ethics are defined? If environmental ethics arose in part as a response to the call for a more inclusive moral community, then how can a traditionally human-centered ethic answer this call? In order to address this question, we need to explore some nuanced versions of anthropocentrism that have arisen in response to environmental issues, as well as become acquainted with nonanthropocentric ethical systems (Table 1).

Anthropocentrism as an Environmental Ethic

In his 1974 book, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, John Passmore establishes himself as an early and prominent anthropocentric environmental ethicist. In reaction to philosophers pushing for the creation of more inclusive moral systems, Passmore asserts that rather than devise a new ethic, what we need is stronger interpretation of our existing ethical obligations. Moreover, Passmore dismisses claims that it would be "intrinsically wrong to destroy a species, cut down a tree [or], clear a wilderness" as "merely ridiculous" (Passmore, 1974: 111). These views build toward his central idea, "the supposition that anything but a human being has 'rights' is [...] quite untenable" (Passmore, 1974: 187). Passmore's views define narrow anthropocentrism, which is characterized by an embrace of traditional human-centered ethics that isolate humans from the environment. Narrow anthropocentrists believe humans alone possess value; human efforts on behalf of nonhuman nature are driven by a desire to serve human needs.

Other anthropocentric environmental ethicists include Kristen Shrader-Frechette and William Frankena, who wonder why we would need a new, more inclusive ethic when we have access to centuries of theoretical philosophy we can apply to environmental issues. The problem, Frankena and others believe, is that we do not currently

Table 1 Environmental ethical frameworks, defining ideas, major thinkers, and common critiques

<i>Ethical system</i>	<i>What counts?</i>	<i>Major thinkers</i>	<i>Some concerns</i>
Anthropocentrism	Humans only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional ethics: most thinkers located the basis for ethics in human ability to reason and cognitive abilities: Aristotle, Mill, Kant Modern ethics: John Passmore, William Frankena, Kristen Shrader-Frechette, Don Marietta; pragmatists such as Ben Minteer, Bryan Norton, Eugene Hargrove, and Andrew Light prefer to discuss ethics in a way that appeals to the wide public and policy-makers, who are generally swayed more effectively by anthropocentrist rhetoric 	Anthropocentric ethics and reductionist science are often blamed for the worldview that has allowed the environmental crisis in the first place. If only humans matter morally, and if all other beings and systems have only instrumental value for humans, then we have little reason to care about or treat other beings with respect unless we serve to benefit from this respect. A nuanced anthropocentrism would argue in response that ecologically humans are dependent upon and embedded within all other beings and systems, therefore making decisions that are good for humans will inevitably also serve all other elements of the environment as well.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrow 	Humans in isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frechette, Don Marietta; pragmatists such as Ben Minteer, Bryan Norton, Eugene Hargrove, and Andrew Light prefer to discuss ethics in a way that appeals to the wide public and policy-makers, who are generally swayed more effectively by anthropocentrist rhetoric 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad 	Humans in ecological context		
Zoocentrism	Some animals, based on shared human traits (such as sentience)	Peter Singer, who advocates a utilitarian (Bentham, Mill) approach for animal liberation, and Tom Regan, who argues for animal rights, a deontological (Kant) approach	<p>Membership in the moral community requires the possession of particular traits, which thus draws the boundaries at sometimes arbitrary places based on current scientific knowledge, e.g., if membership relies on sentience, only animals we know can experience pain and pleasure belong, while others we do not (yet) have the tools to understand remain valuable only instrumentally; some argue that the boundaries established through this lens are not wide enough. Welfarists might respond that we cannot recognize the experience of a thing we do not or cannot know or understand.</p> <p>The widest extension of traditional individualistic ethics casts a wide net, but isolates the individual living being from its context, therefore excluding wholes – ecosystems, habitats, the biotic community – from the moral community. How can a being exist without its context, and is it the same being if it is separated from the relationships that define it? Biocentrists argue that wholes are no more than a collection of individuals.</p>
Biocentrism	All living individuals, membership qualification is only that a thing must be alive	Kenneth Goodpaster and Paul W. Taylor	

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

<i>Ethical system</i>	<i>What counts?</i>	<i>Major thinkers</i>	<i>Some concerns</i>
Ecocentrism (holism)	Individuals and wholes count	Aldo Leopold, J. Baird Callicott, Val Plumwood, Freya Mathews, Kathleen Dean Moore, Arne Naess and the Deep Ecologists, James Lovelock	Collectives exhibit emergent properties that allow the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. With the inclusion of wholes into the moral community, some critics worry that the individual loses standing in matters of ethical conflict. Do species matter more than individuals? Do the needs of society overwhelm the rights of individuals? Proponents of ecocentrism would point out that individuals and collectives are both included in the moral community through this lens, and that communities rely on individuals to thrive.
Universal consideration	Everything might matter morally, therefore we ought to consider organic individuals and systems, as well as inorganic objects, such as rocks and mountains	Thomas Birch	If everything counts, how do we organize our lives in order to act in ways that demonstrate this valuation of the world? How do we approach conflicts, or even survive, if the very act of survival requires impacts on our world and other beings? Birch would argue that this system does not grant entrance into the moral community, rather a reconsideration of all things in context.

employ traditional ethics in competent ways; greater attention to the practice of traditional philosophical dialogue is necessary and sufficient for addressing our current ethical concerns.

Introducing another distinction, Bryan Norton differentiates between narrow anthropocentrism and what he calls weak anthropocentrism, or broad anthropocentrism, as we will refer to it here, which aims for humans to live in “harmony with nature.” While nonhuman nature is still valued only in its relation to humans, this value may take forms other than the instrumental, such as aesthetic, educative, or restorative. Rather than bother with a new theory, Norton suggests, we simply need constraints on traditional anthropocentric behavior to prevent consumptive habits. Broad anthropocentrism “requires no radical, difficult-to-justify claims about the intrinsic value of nonhuman objects and, at the same time, it provides a framework for stating obligations that goes beyond concern for satisfying human preferences” (Norton, 1984: 138). Scholars who adopt this view believe it represents an ethic that is both effective and comfortable to employ, a goal that leads to what might be the most common representation of environmental anthropocentrism: environmental pragmatism.

This enlightened or broad anthropocentrism, recognizing the reality and importance of our ecological relationships, emerged in its current form with the convergence hypothesis of the same Bryan Norton. While variations within environmental pragmatism exist, mostly surrounding a scholar’s adherence to the ideas of the founding American philosophical pragmatists (Dewey, Peirce, and James) and/or emphasis on environmental policy, most pragmatists believe that environmental change requires active solutions to current problems, and that the human population responds best to human-centered language. We ought not get entangled in theoretical dialogue, they suggest, but should focus instead on real answers. Pragmatists argue that when ecologically informed anthropocentric responses lead to the same policy implications as those recommended by a nonanthropocentric ethic, then we should use anthropocentric language to propose change, because more people might listen. Therefore, our journey to an answer is less important than the actual behavioral changes we promote. Norton argues, “active environmentalists [...] believe that policies serving the interests of the human species as a whole, and for the long run, will also serve the ‘interests’ of nature, and vice versa” (Norton, 1991: 240). Andrew Light, Eugene Hargrove, and Ben Minteer also embody this view to some degree.

Another popular form of broad anthropocentrism arises not from policy, but from science. Don Marietta endorses a version of traditional humanism that is holistic, or demonstrative of the value and necessity of scientific

wholes (species, ecosystems, the biotic community) in the lives of humans. By this, Marietta means a nuanced anthropocentrism that embraces the value of our ecological relationships, for it is impossible to isolate humans from their network of relationships, but one that still applies traditional ethical techniques.

Finally, some scholars defend anthropocentrism as the ethic that best embraces human creativity and innovation to address issues that are impacting humans. Biologist W.H. Murdy writes, “It is anthropocentric to value the factors that make us uniquely human, to seek to preserve and enhance such factors and to counter antihuman forces which threaten to diminish or destroy them. Nature outside of man will not act to preserve human values; it is our responsibility alone” (Murdy, 1975: 1171). As a scientist, Murdy also believes in a continued understanding of the ecological relationships in which we participate. But, Murdy continues, “[a]n anthropocentric belief in the value, meaningfulness, and creative potential of the human phenomenon is considered a necessary motivating factor to participatory evolution which, in turn, may be requisite to the future and survival of the human species and its cultural values” (Murdy, 1975: 1172). The implication here is that people will act for themselves in ways that they might not act on behalf of nonhuman nature. This view depends upon, of course, whether people really act this way. Scholars who study environmental values, such as Steven Kellert, have long conducted surveys to analyze the ways people value nonhuman nature, and this kind of social scientific work has the potential to overthrow or verify the anthropocentric assumptions some philosophers embrace.

We must ask, though, if we sacrifice anything else when we look beyond the moral context of our intentions and focus only on the potential consequences of our actions, or when we choose an anthropocentric over a nonanthropocentric approach, even if the end result is the same. Is there something important about the reasons we are motivated to act? Unpacking some of the nonanthropocentric ethical systems will provide us the tools to address this question (Figure 1).

The Other Lenses: A Wider Moral Community

Early approaches to a more inclusive environmental ethic applied traditional ethical systems – utilitarianism (Mill, Bentham) and deontology (Kant) – to situations early thinkers did not imagine. In these systems, value is attributed to recipients (traditionally humans) based on qualities they alone are thought to share. Utilitarianism defines the moral community by members’ ability to experience pleasure and pain. An action is thought to be right if the consequences of the action will result in

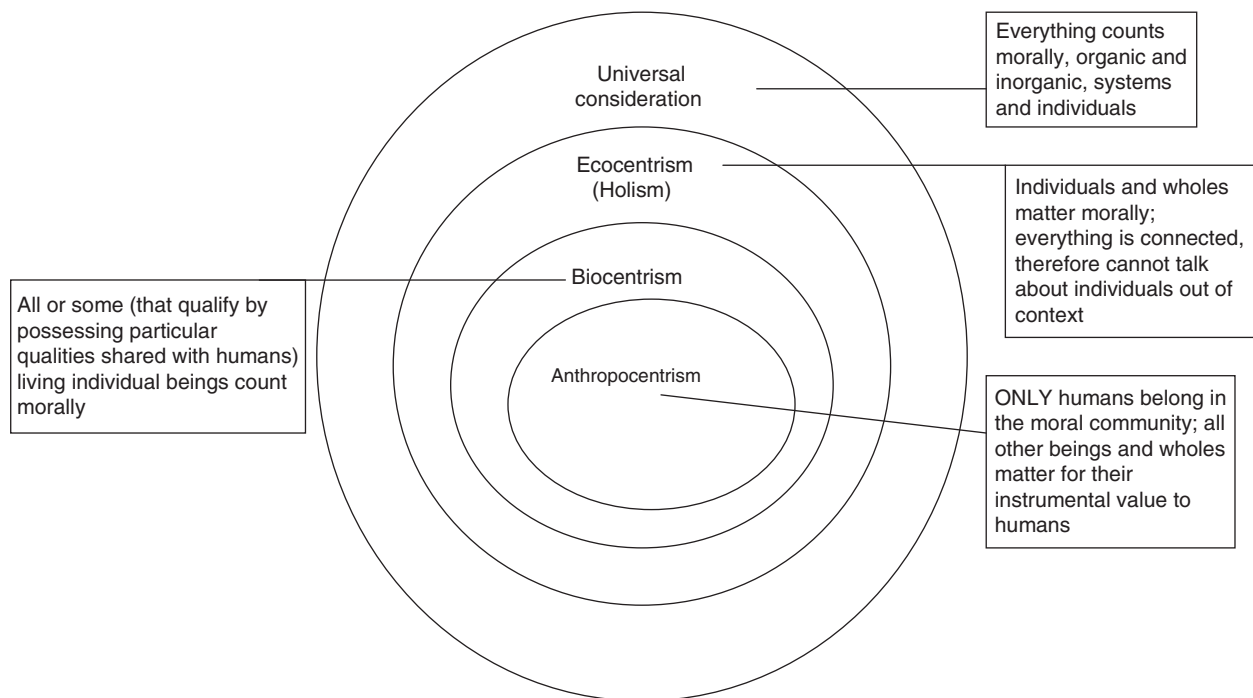


Figure 1 Moral community expansion across prominent theories in environmental ethics.

greater utility than would result if some other action, or no action, were performed. It is, therefore, a results-focused or consequentialist ethic. Kant's deontology, on the other hand, focuses on motivation and intentions rather than consequences. In this ethic, the key to the moral community lies in cognitive ability and reason; we have a duty to respect the rights of certain others who possess these same abilities and we have an obligation to act morally (e.g., not to lie, steal, or cheat), according to moral norms. The difference between utilitarianism and deontology becomes elucidated with an example. Based on a traditional utilitarian ethic, one could theoretically justify framing an innocent person to alleviate the collective stress of a community that fears an uncaught burglar, because the good to many would outweigh the harm done to one. A deontological ethic would preclude this approach because lying (e.g., framing the innocent person) is wrong; regardless of the consequence that lying achieves, the act is immoral. The difference between the two ethics lies in the responsibility of (and to) individual agents versus larger populations, as well as in the emphasis on consequences versus motivation. Traditionally, both ethics were anthropocentric.

While the suffering of nonhuman nature was not historically considered in utilitarian equations, Jeremy Bentham, the founder of modern utilitarianism, suggested animal inclusion with his now-famous admission that animals can also experience pleasure and pain. Thus the door was open for an extension of utilitarianism to animal ethics. In 1975, Peter Singer assessed the blurred

physiological and psychological lines between humans and some animals and asked why we should recognize human pain alone; he wondered if, in fact, it was arbitrary, capricious, and ultimately immoral to do so. If animals are capable of suffering (and clearly many, if not all, are), and if the ability to suffer is the key to moral consideration (which is exactly what utilitarians assert), then why does this suffering not matter morally? He calls this exclusion from the moral community of beings that should qualify by our expressed standards, but are excluded solely on their failure to be human, speciesism. By extending moral standing to sentient beings, Singer introduced what is often referred to, along with the animal rights theory of Tom Regan, as the animal welfare argument. While these two theoretical approaches are quite different, their shared characteristic of extending traditionally anthropocentric ethics (utilitarian and deontological traditions) to some animals unite them as the first line of the nonanthropocentric moral argument, zoocentrism.

Regan approaches animal welfare through a deontological lens. Kant's deontology attributes only indirect moral standing to animals and other beings – a dog matters morally because harming it would impact its owner or because a person who abuses dogs might next abuse humans – and so is clearly anthropocentric. But Regan uses a similar argument, based on the language of rights and obligation, to extend direct moral standing to animals. He examines the qualifications for human inherent value (or worth) and locates the defining characteristic in our role as “experiencing subjects of a life.”

He then applies this standard to animals. Because animals are also experiencing subjects of lives – lives that exist beyond their role as a resource for humans – they also ought to be considered possessors of inherent value. All experiencing subjects of a life ought to share the same basic moral rights, the most fundamental of which is the right to continue to exist, or the right to life.

Zoocentric arguments rely heavily on Darwin's assertions in *The Descent of Man*, which demonstrate that the boundaries between the mental faculties of humans and other species are less clearly defined than traditionally believed, as well as work in the field of cognitive ethology, the study of animal minds. But with the blurring of these previously assumed boundaries and the associated and inevitable moral extension, some scholars wondered why sentience or one's existence as an "experiencing subject of a life" should be the only qualities that warrant moral standing, or whether these are even the right qualities. As science gives us glimpses into the lives of other beings, we might wonder if perhaps there are levels of pain and pleasure, or even affiliated qualifications of a worthwhile experience, in other beings that we are not yet capable of understanding. These questions woven with a continued reexamination of the type of ethical consistency that underlies the zoocentric argument and a desire to found an environmental, as opposed to a human or extended-human, ethic led to the life-centered theories of Kenneth Goodpaster and Paul W. Taylor. Life-centered environmental ethics, the second line of nonanthropocentric extensionism, is called biocentrism.

Kenneth Goodpaster lays the ethical foundation for the moral considerability of all living beings and Paul W. Taylor extends Goodpaster's argument to its furthest limit. Granting equal moral consideration to all individual living things by virtue of the fact that they are "teleological centers of life" and hence have "a good of their own," Taylor posits and defends a radical biotic egalitarianism. Taylor admits that embodying this equal consideration would be paralyzing; rather he suggests it as an ideal, where as many "teleological centers of life" survive as possible. Though Taylor's language suggests the inclusion of wholes derivatively, because they are necessary for the good of their members, populations, according to Taylor, are simply a collection of individuals and do not have a good of their own.

Some scholars, however, view this restriction of the moral community as ecologically naïve, for no individual can exist outside of its greater context. If possession of a "good of its own," as Taylor defines it, is the standard of moral inclusion, then does it not make sense to argue that a species has an interest in a healthy habitat or continued existence? As a response to these questions, we see the emergence of an ecocentric environmental ethic, one that grants moral standing to both individuals and wholes – the systems and collectives in which individuals

participate and exist. Ecocentrism is often posited against anthropocentrism as the extreme on the other end of the environmental ethics argument.

These successively wider boundaries of the moral community aim to respond to scientific observations of the world. If an environmental ethic is to carry weight within policy and decision making, or even as a means to guide people to right action, it needs to reflect the realities of the actual environment. This awareness of the interconnectedness of the natural world fuels ecocentric theorists like Aldo Leopold, J. Baird Callicott, Val Plumwood, Kathleen Dean Moore, Freya Mathews, the Deep Ecologists (including Arne Naess and others), and those ethically motivated by James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. The central difference between these theories and anthropocentrism lies in the placement of humans in the world. Anthropocentrism locates humans, with their higher cognition and rationality, in the center of the moral universe, capable of both affecting the world around them and making decisions about that world. Ecocentrists, on the other hand, place humans as equals among species, participants in an interdependent world. As Leopold explains in a quintessentially nonanthropocentric statement, "a land ethic 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" (Leopold, 1949: 204). Ecocentrists argue that wholes exhibit emergent properties not present in the individuals that allow the collective to exist as something different, something greater, than simply the sum of its parts. This idea is called holism, and while an appreciation of holism defines the ecocentric position, it is also a component of less inclusive ethics. But beyond the recognition of and appreciation for these wholes, ecocentrists grant them direct moral standing, a position defined as ethical holism. Radical holists argue that wholes completely subsume individual entities; therefore, moral standing should extend to wholes alone. More tempered versions of ecocentrism, like those of Leopold, value both wholes and individuals as ends in and of themselves.

At this point, one may wonder if broad anthropocentrists, who advocate a scientifically enlightened anthropocentric position, are also holists based on this description. If one accepts that all things are part of larger entities, more difficult to disentangle from their contexts than we have previously appreciated, then by valuing humans would one not also be valuing the web within which humans exist? The difference between interest-holistic anthropocentrism and ecocentrism lies in where one locates the ethical starting point for valuation and right action. An enlightened anthropocentrist would approach action and value from the starting place of the human, even if the human is suspended in an ecological context. Wholes have value in their relation to humans,

thus matter morally, but secondarily. An ecocentrist would value both wholes and individuals directly. The biotic community is not secondary to the human experience. It is the holder of value in its own right.

Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethic*, often embraced as the seed of modern ecocentrism, embodies this thinking. Here Leopold discusses the extension of human rights – from the moral inclusion of some humans to all humans – and then uses this process to explain the inclusion of collectives:

The extension of ethics to this third element [the land] in the human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. [...] All ethics so far evolved rest upon 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. (Leopold, 1949: 203–204)

Trained in the anthropocentric policies of land management science, not philosophy, Leopold had an awakening experience in which he began to “think like a mountain” and understand that one could not remove predators from a landscape without impacting all other elements of that landscape. We exist in a vast and intimate web of interrelationships. This thinking led to his land ethic and modern philosophical ecocentrism.

Callicott, a founder of environmental philosophy and leading voice in ecocentric theory, believes an environmental ethic can take two forms. Either it can be a plug-and-chug response to environmental problems by inserting an issue into an already formulated ethical theory in order to receive an answer about how to act, an unsatisfying and unnuanced approach to complex problems. Or, Callicott suggests, environmental ethics can do the hard theoretical work to create a new ethic that responds to the constantly changing understanding of the natural world and addresses new, and large, environmental problems, the likes of which our world has never seen. This is the difference between using the tools of anthropocentric ethics and creating a wholly different approach. He advocates for the latter. In his landmark 1980 essay, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” Callicott sets up the animal welfarists not just in tension with traditional moral philosophers who limit the moral community to humans alone, but also in conflict with the ideas of ecocentrism. For rather than inhabiting different rings in the pond of moral extension, biocentric and ecocentric arguments differ not only in their definition of what ought to belong in the moral community, but in their very understanding of the world and how individuals operate within it: either as an interacting collection or as a connected and emergent whole. This three-way relationship, then,

between traditional anthropocentric ethics, early environmental ethics based on an extension of anthropocentric argumentation to some others (zoocentric or biocentric arguments), and ecocentrism, is triangular, with all three corners pulling in different directions. They are mutually exclusive theories. Callicott argues that an extension of individualist traditional ethics cannot successfully defend the moral inclusion of environmental wholes, and a scientifically relevant environmental ethic cannot fail to recognize the moral standing of systems and wholes. Ecocentrism starts, as its ethical grounding, with the collectives and their ecological and moral relevance. According to Callicott, this element designates ecocentrism as the only effective approach to environmental ethics.

Some ethicists push the moral boundaries farther still. Thomas Birch's theory of universal consideration advocates for a potentially-morally-relevant-until-proven-otherwise approach, which grants consideration to all things, living and nonliving, with the understanding that all relationships are important and necessary. Not only ought we think about the way things interact in a more thoughtful way, Birch suggests, or be attentive to scientific reality, but we should also approach our interactions with the world with a heightened moral awareness. In this way, Birch represents an extreme opposition to anthropocentrism.

A Changed Relationship with the Natural World

Whether Leopold or Taylor, Singer or Passmore are correct, or even persuasive, is not of great importance here. Rather it is essential to embrace environmental ethics as an evolving dialogue. So where does a discussion about the widening of the moral community carry us in an explication of anthropocentrism? Questions about science and systems of valuation are important when we appreciate the role of ethics in determining action. The ethic that sways us, and our analysis of these theories, depends on how we approach a series of questions.

The difference between an anthropocentric and a non-anthropocentric ethic ultimately hinges on what it means to be a human. As humans are we a dominant or an equal species? How do we define the natural world, independently and in relation to ourselves, and why do we (or should we) care about it? What is the role of humans in protecting, experiencing, and participating with other beings and collectives? What is the relationship between ecology and ethics?

In addition, we need to examine the goals of environmental philosophy. Lynn White Jr. utilizes the language of a crisis that needs address; he invokes a sense of urgency. The problematic ethic that White suggests is

the cause of our environmental crisis requires a revision of our relationship with the natural world in order to be healed. Tied to the notion of an environmental ethic, then, is a call for change, a call to action.

Environmental pragmatism has embraced this call, prioritizing action as a guiding principle in ethical dialogue. But will any action serve this revision of our relationship with the natural world? Do intentions matter? Can we respond to environmental issues by engaging whatever language might sway an audience, whether anthropocentric or nonanthropocentric? Or are there reasons we ought to be attentive to the nuances of our dialogue and the ethic that drives our actions? These are important questions in an understanding of and discussion about anthropocentrism as an applied environmental ethic. Addressing them might help guide one's journey toward a meaningful relationship with, and perhaps even to right action on behalf of, the natural world. In addition, an analysis of these questions leads us to a clearer picture of the path environmental ethics has taken as it has developed.

In response to changing environmental issues, globalization, and the inclusion of voices not traditionally included in ethical discussions, new kinds of ethical arguments about our relationship with the natural world have emerged, including ecofeminism (and related ecological feminisms). Though a precise definition of ecofeminism remains unsettled, most scholars would argue that it is both an activism and a philosophy that addresses the nested issues of gender discrimination and environmental degradation. It is the bridging of feminism and environmentalism with the goal of addressing and alleviating all forms of discrimination. These theories critique anthropocentrism based not on what is included in our valuation of the natural world, but on what is excluded from the valuation process – certain voices – and on the power dynamics inherent in this traditional valuation process.

Some feminist theorists are concerned with the role played by the traditionally anthropocentric institutions of early science and religion that helped shape our current environmental ethic. In her book *The Ecological Self*, Freya Mathews traces the rise of individualism, or substance pluralism, and attributes its hold on Western thought to certain culture-defining scientific theories, namely Newtonian atomism, which dictated a wider worldview, which in turn influenced the development of a cultural environmental ethic. Her views about the masculinization of science, or the androcentric bias of Western rational thought and its impacts on our relationship with the natural world, parallel those of other feminist authors, including Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, and Donna Haraway. Mathews believes “conventional atomistic cosmology as it informs modern western consciousness [...] is] a ‘bad’ cosmology – representing Nature not as hostile but as indifferent to our interests” (Mathews,

1991: 14). If we view nature as indifferent, then we have set up a dynamic in which we are always at odds. This inherent conflict is detrimental to the well-being of the natural world. It is also representative of the cultural dualisms that concern feminist thinkers, because they operate with what Karen Warren calls “the logic of domination.”

A prominent voice in ecofeminism, Warren explains that “there are important connections – historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical – between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (Warren, 1990: 125). Western thinking has associated women with emotion and natural processes, in contrast to the male realm of logic and the mind. To address this schism, Warren calls for a shift from conquest-driven thinking, which enables a hierarchical relationship with the natural world, to a care-based relationship with nonhuman nature. Some feminist scholars would argue that anthropocentrism, both in its historical roots and in its perpetuation of dichotomies, precludes this type of relationship.

Other thinkers wonder even at the logic of a worldview that separates humans from their land context. An examination of a number of indigenous relationships with the natural world demonstrates it would be ridiculous, even impossible, to value some humans without also valuing their land, for the two are so entwined in action and identity that they cannot be parsed. Consider the Ojibwe belief that humans and nonhuman animals are brothers and sisters, or the Aboriginal landscape deities, or the centrality of prey animals in Inuit clothing, food, religion, and social activity. Nonhuman animals and landscape features not only tie the people to the land, but inhabit every element of the human experience. An anthropocentric ethic applied to these relationships would be nonsensical, because it would morally recognize only part of a whole, a severance that might even serve to redefine the valued part and make it something other, thus not valuable in the way we intend.

Can these land relationships inform a discussion about an ethic to serve a modern Western audience that lacks this same connection to the land? One could argue that this very disconnect between the humans and the land is a result of long-term cultural anthropocentrism, or that it has contributed to our present destructive behaviors toward the natural world. One could imagine an argument that supported an effort to restore this kind of land identity in order to address environmental problems. In this way, some indigenous relationships could demonstrate an argument against the value of an anthropocentric ethic.

Beyond this question about the logic of anthropocentrism lie graver substantive questions, as well. Some scholars worry that if we abandon a concern with intentions and focus only on results, in the way that we might use anthropocentrism to sell a behavioral change to the

public, we will sacrifice some important ethical considerations. Despite the ways that anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric viewpoints may converge in action or policy recommendation, there are important ways that they diverge. Katie McShane explains:

Ethics legitimately raises questions about how to feel, not just about which actions to take or which policies to adopt. From the point of view of norms for feeling, anthropocentrism has very different practical implications from nonanthropocentrism; it undermines some of the common attitudes – love, respect, awe – that people think it appropriate to take toward the natural world. (McShane, 2007: 169)

The author refers to the thinking behind Hume's philosophy of moral sentiments and E.O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis. These feelings of love and care emerge in Leopold, and they exist throughout environmental literature. McShane explains, "Claims about why something has value are claims about why we, as moral agents, have reason to care about the thing. More precisely, they are claims about why the thing is worth caring about" (McShane, 2007: 172). To adopt an ethic that would make these feelings impossible or wrong would be a mistake, she argues; it would alienate a great number of environmentalists from environmental policy and decision making.

McShane's response focuses on what is perhaps an immeasurable quality of the human–nature relationship, while other scholars instead focus on the quantifiable elements of our relationship with the natural world. Anthropocentric views of the environment adapt well to cost–benefit analysis, a version of utilitarianism in which the language of economic gain and loss replaces the language of pain and pleasure; this approach employs the only type of value that makes sense for many people, monetary value. What happens, though, to elements of the natural world that elude monetary valuation? Are only beautiful places valuable because people will pay for them? What about the wetlands that allow the drainage of a so-called beautiful place, but which many people would not pay for? Some people therefore wonder if an anthropocentric ethic can capture the true value of nature. If it cannot, it would fail as a guiding environmental ethic.

Surely, though, should we use the language that best serves the environmental change we desire? In a recent conversation with students we raised this question. "Unless we are preaching to the chorus," they answered, "we won't change minds by trying to convince people they should value nature for its own good. People understand a future generations argument, though, and they understand things that might save them money." Thus, we ought to sell nature however we can, because any

change in behavior is better than none. And maybe it is. But in selling a product, which is nature, we might just sacrifice some of the meaning and substance of the very thing we value, in addition to selling ourselves short at the same time.

One could project an argument that weighs short-term minor changes against long-term grander changes, and while most environmentalists would likely prefer the big changes, many fear that we need small steps in order to build momentum, and we should take what we can get. In theory, this argument makes sense, but in context, it gets fuzzier. For what is the real societal gain when people make a multitude of insubstantial behavioral changes – e.g., if thousands of low-mpg cars are purchased in a national effort, when the mpg standards are a great compromise in the first place, and the real impacts on global warming lie elsewhere – then feel they have done their part to positively effect global climate change. They sit back and feel good, even though these small changes will, in fact, have little to no impact on the larger problems. But the decision-makers, in selling this small change, have arguably exhausted their audience and therefore have lost power, not gained momentum. Rather than influence a changed relationship with the natural world, they might have only stimulated habit alterations, something different not only in scale, but also in kind, to the lifestyle and ethical changes that many scholars feel are necessary.

It is also reasonable to wonder if we limit ourselves by restricting the types of public arguments we make. If we rely only on anthropocentric language because we think it is all people will hear, we might be dwarfing our moral imagination, or precluding other kinds of argumentation in the future, because different language eventually becomes too foreign and uncomfortable. Our concern about the engagement and interest capabilities of the public might confine the individual moral abilities of other thinkers, and perhaps our broader cultural moral fortitude, as well. Do we sell not just the issues, but ourselves, short? Could we instead challenge ourselves to craft more persuasive, more creative arguments that tell the story about nature we believe? Can we, and should we, aim high? Intentions and outcomes both color our relationship with the natural world, and this relationship has great consequences for our world.

Why Our Environmental Ethic Matters

Of course, not all anthropocentric arguments are default positions. Many thinkers believe anthropocentrism presents the strongest, most effective case for our interactions with the natural world. And these arguments can, and do, overlap with nonanthropocentric arguments when they adopt a holistic perspective, one that recognizes the

interconnectedness of all beings and systems. If we care about ourselves and our future, broad anthropocentrists argue, we will act to protect and respect all of the things we interact with, all of the things that we depend upon, and all of the things that sustain us.

And ultimately, these are the questions that matter most. What do we value in and about the natural world? What are our roles as valuers and moral agents? How can we best act to honor these valuations? Our answers here can help us navigate ethical discussions about the natural world and can potentially help us create the world we envision and desire.

So as we address the environmental issues of our time, we should be conscious of the implications of our language, attentive to how our policies prescribe value in the natural world, and perhaps grateful for the rational power and emotional sensitivity to experience and manage the natural world for all of these considerations. And then we must ask ourselves: Are we responsible for nature, as Passmore argues, or stewards of sentient beings, as the zoocentrists might suggest? Are we logically consistent when we morally consider some beings and not others, and if not, is there a way to respect all living beings without considering also the inorganic elements of their habitats and landscapes? Can we consider beings and not the wholes and systems that emerge when a multitude of individuals acts and exists in connection, rather than in proximity? Our understanding of science and ecology matters here. If the natural world is balanced and orderly, then we can perhaps make predictions about our actions and projections about the impacts of our choices and the roles of certain others. But if the natural world is instead chaotic and unpredictable, how do we understand these relationships differently? How do we act when we are unsure of the consequences of our actions? With caution? With care? With gratitude? For in our ethical descriptions lie also ethical prescriptions. Why and how we value the natural world ought to dictate how we act on behalf of, and within, the natural world. Anthropocentrism is not just about who matters and why. It is about how we honor that value in relationship. These are the stakes of environmental ethics and the weight of our responsibilities for, in, and to the natural world.

See also: Biocentrism; Consequentialism and Deontology; Deep Ecology; Feminist Ethics; Gaia

Hypothesis; Intrinsic and Instrumental Value; Pragmatism; Speciesism; Utilitarianism.

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Biographical Sketches

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Michael P. Nelson holds a joint appointment as a professor of environmental ethics and philosophy in the Lyman Briggs College, the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Department of Philosophy at Michigan State University. He is the coeditor or coauthor of *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (University of Georgia Press, 1998), *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate* (University of Georgia Press, 2008), *American Indian Environmental Ethics: An Ojibwa Case Study* (Prentice Hall, 2004) (all with J. Baird Callicott), and *Moral Ground: Why It's Wrong to Wreck the World* (Trinity University Press, 2010) with Kathleen Dean Moore. He is also resident philosopher of the Isle Royale wolf–moose project, the longest continuous study of a predator–prey system in the world; and cocreator and codirector of the Conservation Ethics Group, an environmental ethics and problem-solving consultancy group.