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Species Equality and the Foundations of Moral Theory

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ABSTRACT: The paper discusses various concepts of 'species equality' and 'species superiority' and the assumptions concerning intrinsic value on which they depend. I investigate what philosophers from the traditional deontological (Taylor and Lombardi) and utilitarian (Singer and Attfield) perspectives have meant by their claims for species equality. I attempt to provide a framework of intrinsic values that justifies one sense in which members of a species can be said to be superior to members of another species.

KEYWORDS: Equality, superiority, intrinsic values

I. INTRODUCTION

When considering the relative moral standings of human and nonhuman animals, Mill invites us to contemplate Socrates dissatisfied and the swine satisfied.¹ Mill's judgment in favour of the unhappy Socrates serves to illustrate his reply to the charge that utilitarianism reduces the moral dimension of our lives to our animal nature; this, in spite of the fact that one of the strengths of utilitarianism is the ease with which it countenances issues of animal morality. One might expect a utilitarian such as Singer, whose concerns are more animal-centred, and who makes explicit claims in favour of species equality, to reject Mill's preference as an instance of mere speciesism. Instead, along with his claims for species equality, we find the following remark,

It is not arbitrary to hold that the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, of complex acts of communication, and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities.²

Here, then, we find a theoretical tension within utilitarianism between the notion of species equality, on the one hand, and the notion of members of one species being of 'more value' than members of another.

This strain is not peculiar to utilitarians. In Paul Taylor's recent book, *Respect for Nature*, we find the claim that every species has equal inherent worth, and even the additional claim, that this sense of species equality entails species

impartiality.³ These equality and impartiality claims, however, are conjoined with the view that factors such as “maintaining a high level of culture” can provide the justification for the nonbasic interests of persons superseding the most basic interests, even the inherent worth, of member of other species.⁴ This is the deontological version of the theoretical tension faced by Singer. In a slightly different form, it has been characterized by Dale Jamieson as the view that “animals ... are all equal; but some are more equal than others”.⁵

This paper is a discussion of various concepts of ‘species equality’ and ‘species superiority’ and the axiological assumptions on which they depend.⁶ First, I investigate what philosophers from both the traditional utilitarian and deontological perspectives have meant by their claims for species equality. I hope to show that the inadequacies in their assumptions about intrinsic values result in, and leave unresolved, the theoretical tension outlined above. Second, I attempt to outline an axiological framework and subsequent definition of species superiority which more adequately explains and justifies Mill’s claim, echoed by Singer, that “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.”⁷

Before beginning the investigation into the senses of equality and superiority it will be helpful to generalize the central issue of this paper. Rather than asking if, and in what sense, humans are superior to members of other species, we should ask whether and in what sense members of any species are superior to members of any other species. Posing the question in this way has at least two advantages. First, if the question is answered in a positive way, I will be less vulnerable to charges of speciesism, i.e. the favouring of one species (humans) over others simply in virtue of its being the species it is. Second, we are more likely to arrive at a *per se* reason as to why or why not some species might be said to be superior to another, as opposed to some reason which, while justifying Mill’s claim concerning Socrates and the hypothetical swine, leaves unaddressed the claim that it is better to be a wolf unsatisfied than an oak tree satisfied.

II. EQUALITY AND INHERENT WORTH

I begin by considering the recent work of Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature*. In attempting to demonstrate his version of the species equality thesis, Taylor first considers an array of traditional arguments for various species superiority theses; these arguments are rejected for various reasons. Taylor then turns to his positive ‘demonstration’ of species equality.

Taylor’s positive argument goes as follows:

1. Humans are members of the Earth’s Community of Life.
2. Nature is a system of interdependence of which we are a part.
3. Other beings are also teleological centres of life.

4. Therefore, human superiority is unreasonable.

Taylor is careful to insist that this argument is not intended as a piece of valid deductive reasoning, but rather that a person who accepts the three premises of the argument will find it *unreasonable* to believe in human superiority.⁸

From the above informal line of reasoning Taylor draws the further conclusion:

5. Therefore, every species counts as having the same value in the sense that every species is deserving of *equal* concern and consideration on the part of moral agents.⁹

The notion here is that the good (inherent worth) of every being is equally worthy of being preserved and protected. This, he calls the principle of species impartiality.

It is clear from the above line of reasoning, as well as from elsewhere in Taylor's work, that the criterion for having moral standing is found in Premise 3. A being merits moral consideration so long as the being is a teleological centre of life. Here Taylor introduces the technical notion of inherent worth. He claims that a being has inherent worth just in case the being has "a good of its own" (is a teleological centre of life). Inherent worth, however, is not identical with the being's 'good of its own' since the good of the being (corresponding to the capacities of the being) is a *fact* from which we would be unable to derive any evaluative conclusions. The value of inherent worth, for which "having a good of its own" is a sufficient condition, is the value from which evaluative conclusions can be drawn.¹⁰ This being the sole foundation of moral evaluation, Taylor's axiology is seen to be monistic. There is only one ultimate moral good, inherent worth.

Taylor's claims in favour of species equality, then, can be understood in terms of the following definitions, the second of which has, in his view, no instances:

E1. Members of species, S1, are equal to members of species, S2,

=df Members of S1 and S2 have equal inherent worth.

S1. Members of species, S1, are superior to members of species, S2,

=df Members of S1 have more (a higher degree of) inherent worth than do members of S2.

The above definition of 'equality', together with the claim that, necessarily, all teleological centres of life (beings with inherent worth) have *equal* inherent worth, lead Taylor to the conclusion that all teleological centres of life are morally equal. Taylor's specific rejection of human superiority is properly seen as an instance of the more general claim that members of all species are equal. As we have seen, he concludes from this that members of every species are deserving of equal concern and consideration on the part of moral agents.

While the above argument clearly *raises* the issue of the compatibility of accepting human (or any other species) superiority and at the same time embracing an attitude of respect for nature, it does not seem to answer the question of whether such a combination is inconsistent or even unreasonable. In fact, Taylor's claims to species equality and impartiality are belied by the claims alluded to earlier. In the section of his book dealing with moral conflicts, Taylor asks:

Now, fulfilling the [nonbasic] interests of humans in our present case is held to be so important ... *even for those who have the attitude of respect for nature* ... as to be worth the cost of harming wildlife. What is the basis for this special importance?¹¹

In answer to this question Taylor outlines a set of factors which ground "this special importance". They are: "contributions to human civilization seen from a broad historical perspective, maintaining a high level of culture, intellectual, aesthetic, legal, political and economic systems needed for a community's steady advance toward a high level of civilized life". On the basis of these factors, Taylor formulates his Principle of Minimum Wrong:

When rational, informed, and autonomous persons *who have adopted the attitude of respect for nature* are nevertheless unwilling to forego the values mentioned above, even though they are aware that the consequences of pursuing those values will involve harm to wild animals and plants, it is permissible for them to pursue those values only so long as doing so involves fewer wrongs than other alternatives.¹²

I raise these factors and cite this principle not to quarrel with them. Rather, it seems that such factors and the principle which springs from them are incompatible with the above understanding of equal inherent worth in all species, especially when this value is touted as the foundation of moral standing. Further, such considerations clearly show that there are *other values* which carry moral weight and that these values can outweigh inherent worth.

In defence against the challenge that the above principle is not compatible with the inherent worth of nonhuman animals and plants, Taylor distinguishes his view from that of the utilitarian who does not recognize the existence of inherent worth in beings;

The Principle of Minimum Wrong does not consider the beings that are benefited or harmed as so many containers of intrinsic value or dependent value ... each being has inherent worth as an individual and must accordingly be treated with respect, regardless of what species it belongs to.¹³

But the Principle of Minimum Wrong, allowing as it does the destruction of a prairie dog town for the construction of a library (provided no better location is available), appears to be as close to vacuous as one can imagine. What is it to show respect in such cases?¹⁴ What does it mean to recognize the inherent worth of the 'container' in such cases? Whatever it requires, it is not enough to save the

prairie dogs even when the values associated with our nonbasic interests conflict with what is clearly their most basic interest. Again, I do not mean to be taking issue with Taylor's conclusions here. I intend, rather, to suggest that on this deontological scheme of things, one cannot get far without recognizing that there are many values involved in such issues, all of which have moral import from the start.

One way in which someone might attempt to avoid the problems faced by Taylor would be to claim that inherent worth comes in degrees. Taylor's criterion for species equality would be accepted, but his further claim that members of all species, in fact, have equal inherent worth would be denied. This would have the consequence that some species are superior to others. Insofar as Taylor's claim for species impartiality rests on his claim for species equality, that too could be denied. The result would be an alternative justification for resolving the conflicts discussed above, but one which accepts, if in degrees, Taylor's monistic axiology.

Such a position is offered by Louis Lombardi¹⁵ and rejected by Taylor.¹⁶ The reasons offered by Taylor for rejecting Lombardi's view further illustrate the weakness of his axiological scheme.

Lombardi's argument runs as follows:

1. Animals and plants are different types of living things.
2. These types are differentiated by the ranges of their capacities.
3. The greater the range of an entity's capacities, *the higher degree of its inherent worth*.
4. Humans have a greater range of capacities than animals and plants.
5. Therefore, humans are superior in inherent worth to animals and plants. (See SI above.)

While Lombardi's claims are for human superiority, the criterion with which he justifies his claim is completely general, i.e., premise 3. He might as well have claimed that nonhuman animals are superior to plants. His argument, then, is not subject to the charge of speciesism.

Taylor's approach to Lombardi's argument is to accept Premises 1, 2, and 4. In his acceptance of Premise 4, he cites the capacities of abstract reasoning, moral judgment, and aesthetic creativity as "the psychological, moral, cognitive, and cultural capacities *special to them*".¹⁷ This, of course, leaves premise 3; Taylor asks:

Why does having a wider range of capacities correlate with, or serve as a ground for, greater inherent worth? Unless this connection is made clear, no conclusion concerning human superiority follows from the mere fact that humans have additional capacities to those found in other species.¹⁸

Lombardi's reasoning is that since the notion of inherent worth is ultimately grounded in the having of capacities, it only makes sense that a greater range of capacities should entail a greater degree of inherent worth.

Taylor, however, holds the view that the notion of degrees of inherent worth is incoherent. To see why this is so we need only look at the way in which Taylor's notion of inherent worth is introduced. In partial reply to Lombardi, Taylor claims that it is not capacities as such that ground inherent worth but,

the fact that those capacities are organized in a certain way ... so that the organism as a whole can be said to have *a good of its own*, which it seeks to realize ... To say that some have greater worth than others is to say that *the good* of some is more deserving of realization than that of others.¹⁹

This specification of Taylor's understanding of teleological centres of life indeed explains why, on his view, such value could not come in degrees. Every living thing, according to Taylor, has its capacities "organized in a certain way"; this *organization* defines *the good* of the organism. A moral preference for one organization of capacities over another must presumably be grounded on some value feature other than inherent worth. But, as we have seen, such a feature is not available within Taylor's monistic axiology.

There are at least three responses to Taylor's rejection of the notion of degrees of inherent worth. Each of these suggestions, however, points to the conclusion that we abandon Taylor's monistic axiology. First, one is tempted to suggest, along Lombardi's line of thinking, that the *complexity* of the organism's organization is relevant to the value of the organism. The more complex the organism, the more inherent worth the organism would be said to have. But this line of reasoning would require that either complexity *per se* be valuable or that the complexity be of a number of *independently valuable items* (capacities, for example). On either alternative, the monism of inherent worth, shared by Taylor and Lombardi, must be abandoned.

Second, one might suggest, again along the lines of Lombardi's argument, that each capacity carries with it a measure of inherent worth independent of the organism's organizational principles. (This is surely what Lombardi intends.) Such a view is no improvement over Taylor's insistence on the singular good of an organism. The good associated with the capacity to desire is satisfaction of desire. The goods associated with the capacities for nutrition and growth are being nourished and being healthy. These goods are *distinct* goods. To claim that each capacity has *the same good*, inherent worth, and that this good mounts up in degrees, at best obfuscates the value considerations involved in one's axiology. At worst, it misrepresents a pluralistic axiology of goods proper to capacities as being a monistic axiology of inherent worth.

It must be remembered that 'inherent worth' is a technical notion (though it may be grounded in pre-theoretical intuitions about value). As such, its role must be to clarify issues rather than render them more obscure. When the veil of

inherent worth is lifted, we see behind it the plurality of sources of values proper to various organisms. Taylor has obfuscated the issue by grounding inherent worth on the alleged fact that there is such a thing as ‘the’ (singular) good of an organism.

Third, we might view the introduction of ‘inherent worth’ as that of a technical notion which leaves entirely open the issue of whether there are other morally relevant goods proper to an organism in virtue of which one organism might be superior to another.²⁰ We could regard the notion of inherent worth as the least condition for having moral standing: the condition, so to speak, for getting into the moral ball game. This understanding of inherent worth leaves open the possibility that other values might be of moral importance, values upon which differentiation of species might be grounded and upon which the issues involved in Taylor’s cases of conflicting claims might be resolved.

III. EQUALITY AND LIKE INTERESTS

Let us turn now to the utilitarian scheme of things. Peter Singer’s claims that members of all species having moral standing are equal are familiar. Following Bentham, Singer grounds the having of moral standing on “the capacity for suffering and enjoying things”.²¹ His understanding of the concepts of species equality and species superiority can be stated as follows:

- EII. Members of species, S1, are equal to members of species, S2,
 =df The like interests of members of S1 and S2 ought to be given the same moral weight (regardless of the species to which they belong).
- SII. Members of species, S1, are superior to members of species, S2,
 =df Members of S1 ought to be given moral preference over members of S2 whenever their like interests conflict.

Of course, it is Singer’s view that anyone who accepts that members of one (sentient) species are superior, in the above sense, to members of another (sentient) species is a speciesist.

According to EII, then, it is the like interests of individuals that are to be considered equally and not the individuals themselves. Or, perhaps more charitably, the individuals are to be given equal consideration *by considering their like interests equally*. This feature of the utilitarian view is no doubt the basis for Taylor’s (and Regan’s) claim that such views ignore the value of the individual (‘container’), giving exclusive claim to intrinsic value to the states of individuals as determined by their interests.

We are now in a position to recall Singer’s caveat to his insistence on species equality to the effect that there are grounds for holding that the life of a self-aware being is more valuable than that of a being which lacks such awareness. At another point, Singer claims,

It is an implication of this principle of equality that our concern for others ought not to depend on what they are like, or what abilities they possess – although precisely what this concern requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do.²²

How are we to understand our obligations to others in light not only of the above principle of species equality but the fact that in our dealings with others, both human and nonhuman, the conflicts which confront us involve not only like interests but unshared interests as well?

In his article, “Interspecific Justice”,²³ Donald VanDeVeer provides a utilitarian account of the classification of interests and the priority of interests in action. VanDeVeer first distinguishes between the basic and nonbasic interests of beings. The basic interests of a being are those necessary for survival; the nonbasic interests are those the satisfaction of which are not required for survival. Within the category of nonbasic interests there are those which are serious and those which are peripheral. The neglect of the serious interests of an individual, while not threatening the survival of the being, nonetheless represents a serious cost to the creature’s well-being.

VanDeVeer addresses the problem of priority of interests in action by claiming that, in general, basic interests should be given priority over nonbasic interests; serious interests should be given priority over peripheral interests. These principles are compatible with Singer’s version of species equality and, at the same time, provide the basis for understanding the utilitarian sense of species preference.

To the above classification of interests and the preferences entailed by them, VanDeVeer adds a ‘weighing principle’. This principle is intended to give guidance in cases of cross-species conflicts. Briefly, its provisions are as follows:²⁴

If A and B are members of different species, and the interests of A conflict with those of B:

- 1) Sacrifice the like interests of A to those of B, if B possesses psychological capacities lacking in A.
- 2) Sacrifice the basic interests of A to the serious interests of B, if B possesses psychological capacities lacking in A.

There are serious difficulties with both provisions (1) and (2); I will mention one problem with each. First, consider principle (2); imagine that B has a serious interest in developing the full range of his cognitive abilities. Imagine that B chooses to satisfy his cognitive curiosity concerning the life-span of elm trees by cutting down the oldest elm tree he can find, A. Here we have a case where the basic interests of A are in conflict with the serious interests of B. The mere fact that B possesses psychological capacities lacking in A seems irrelevant to whether it is permissible for B to kill A.²⁵

With regard to principle (1), I will not object by way of presenting a counter-example. I point out rather that, like principle (2), principle (1) does not provide us with a *per se* reason for preferring the basic interests of one species to another. Are we not entitled to ask *why* the having of psychological capacities is sufficient for such a preference?

Of course, VanDeVeer does provide us with his reasons why these psychological capacities are to yield such preferences. The argument is that giving greater weight to beings with higher psychological capacities will (always?) produce a greater balance of pleasure over pain.²⁶ But such a justification begs the question; for, of course, beings with higher psychological capacities will suffer harms if denied the satisfactions associated with those capacities. And beings which lack those capacities will not suffer *those* harms. But why should those harms count for so much when, as in (2) above, A is sacrificing everything?

At one point in his discussion of the relative worth of capacities, Taylor asks whether the capacity for rational thought is superior to the capacity to see a mouse at two hundred yards.²⁷ The question is to the point. For the eagle the latter is more important; for us, the former is.²⁸ There is a strong suggestion of speciesism in VanDeVeer's justification of the priority principles. While the principles are stated in a general way, the capacities which we, and our close neighbours the 'higher' sentient beings, possess are given implicit preference.

If utilitarians are to provide an account of the sense in which species are equal and, at the same time, to provide a nonspeciesist account of species preference, several steps must be taken. First, the ground for having moral standing must be amended. While being sentient is sufficient for having moral standing, it is not necessary; this shift will begin to make room for the counter example to VanDeVeer's (1) above. Secondly, the claim embraced by Mill and, I have suggested, by Singer and VanDeVeer, that some capacities (or the states associated with them) are qualitatively superior to others must be abandoned. This second departure from classical utilitarianism leaves us in a position to reformulate a morally acceptable sense of species superiority. In what follows, I set out such a view in broad outline.

IV. AXIOLOGICAL PLURALISM

Following Attfield and others, I understand the interests constitutive of having moral standing to include the relevant interests of plants and nonsentient animals. I include these interests on the grounds that trees, unlike stones and trains, have interests and corresponding goods of their own. It is in virtue of such interests that plants, and indeed animals, can be said to be benefited or harmed. Having such interests, then, I take to be sufficient for having minimal moral standing.²⁹

This expansion of the moral domain should be viewed as an extension of

classical utilitarianism rather than as a rejection of it. The claim is that there is a broader range of goods worthy of moral consideration than merely the good of pleasure. Nor is such an expansion of the scope of intrinsic goods unprecedented apart from the concerns of environmental ethics. We find similar extensions within the domain of human ethics offered by W. D. Ross (a nonutilitarian)³⁰ and G. E. Moore (a utilitarian, if of his own brand).³¹

Before continuing with our discussion of the relevance of this expanded understanding of intrinsic value for the issue of species equality and superiority, we should consider a qualification of this axiological pluralism offered by Robin Attfield. After accepting the view of interests, benefits and harms outlined above, Attfield characterizes the argument for such a criterion for moral standing as being ‘analogical’.³² He presents the argument in this form:

Accordingly, ... there is some analogy between them [trees] and items which are widely agreed to have [moral] 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 ... So there is an analogical argument for holding that all the organisms concerned not only can but do have moral standing.³³

In response to objections to the claim that plants are worthy of our moral consideration, Attfield replies that:

The argument ... survives, but is no stronger than its *analogical basis* allows, and at this point the disanalogies between conscious and unconscious organisms become important.³⁴

What does Attfield mean when he characterizes the above argument as ‘analogical?’ One might think that, as in the case of the analogical argument for ‘other minds’, we are only entitled to derive that such beings have goods *with some degree of probability*.³⁵ Thus, the stronger the analogy, say, between ourselves and higher animals as opposed to plants, the higher the probability of their having the interests in question, and so the more probable it is that they have moral standing. Thus, since the probability of trees having interests is so low, “[t]he intrinsic value of trees, would be so slender by comparison with the grounds of other rights as to be outweighed most of the time, so much so as to disappear into near oblivion”.³⁶ Assuming that the argument is analogical and only establishes its conclusion with some probability, we should note that this epistemological point, while morally relevant, would not be the only morally relevant consideration.

Suppose that the health of the tree is a ‘basic’ good, thus while we may only suppose with some (low) level of probability that a tree has that good, its being ‘basic’ might be more relevant in terms of decision making than the relatively low level of certainty we have in its being an actual good of trees. Consider an example from the human realm: suppose we know that an action has a certain

probability of resulting in the death a person and another course of action has a higher probability of resulting in some pain (but not death) for a person. There are two morally relevant dimensions in making a moral decision in such a case; one, the relevant probabilities and two, the relative degrees of harm that might eventuate. Similarly, if we take into account that the probability of a tree having some good, say health, is relatively low, we must also take into account that that good, if the tree in fact has it, is basic to the tree. The appeal to probability here is Bentham's test of 'certainty' applied in the context of a pluralistic axiology. But it is one test among many.

What does not follow, on this interpretation of the 'analogical' character of the argument, is that the goods in question are merely similar, or 'goods by analogy' depending on whether the organisms in question are conscious or not as the above remark from Attfield suggests. On this interpretation of the argument, the good of bodily health in a tree is the same good as the good of bodily health in me, just as (bodily) pleasure in a dog is the same as (bodily) pleasure in me. The difference is, on this interpretation, that it is just more likely that I have such a good than it is that a tree has such a good.

In other words, Attfield's claim that "at this point the disanalogies between conscious and unconscious become important" is misplaced. Even if the argument for the intrinsic good of trees establishes its conclusion *with certainty*, the 'disanalogies' (dissimilarities?) between conscious and unconscious organisms would be important. This is because there is, in the case of a conscious organism, a wider range of goods to be considered than in the case of a unconscious organism. It is not due to the fact that the argument only establishes its conclusion with some (low) degree of probability.

A second interpretation of Attfield's use of 'analogical' suggests itself as well. Perhaps Attfield is suggesting that the term 'interests' when applied to nonsentient organisms is being used by analogy rather than in the same sense in which it is used when applied to sentient organisms. This is suggested by his apparent distinction between the *argument's* being an analogy and "the analogical *basis*" of the argument. Suppose, for example, that the tree's interest in health is only analogous to the human interest in health; that these interests are 'like' in this sense. Why should we give *equal* weight to what are merely *analogous* interests? How can we determine *how much* weight should be given to analogical interests, given that, as the above remark from Attfield suggests, they should not be given equal weight? Perhaps the amount of weight given should depend on the strength of the analogy. (This is what Attfield's remark suggests.) Or should they be given 'equal' weight where 'equality' is understood analogically? It is difficult to see how Attfield could maintain that "the argument [for the moral standing of nonsentient organisms] *survives*" given this equivocal understanding of the terms used in the argument. In fact, Attfield himself appeals to the equivocal uses of terms such as interests when he argues that cars *do not* have moral standing in spite of their having (in some other sense) interests.³⁷

But is the argument for moral standing an ‘analogical’ argument in either of the senses discussed above? With respect to the “qualities and capacities” which “make [it] true” that these organisms have ‘interests’, it is not a matter of analogy that the organisms in question have interests. It is a biological fact about the organisms. And whatever justifies our attribution of goods (and, hence, moral standing) to organisms such as ourselves on the basis of our having such interests, should justify the attribution of the relevant goods (and, hence moral standing) to any organism that has such interests.

I offer the following version of the argument found in Attfield:

1. Plants have interests (grounded in their capacities for growth, respiration, self-preservation and reproduction.)
2. The interests in (1) are common to sentient and (some) nonsentient organisms.
3. The interests in (1) are sufficient to ground the attribution of moral standing to sentient organisms.
4. Therefore, the interests in (1) are sufficient to ground the attribution of moral standing to plants (nonsentient organisms.)

This argument is clearly not an argument from analogy in either of the senses discussed above. At the same time, the argument shares with the ‘probability’ interpretation the virtue of univocal attribution of ‘interests’, ‘goods’, and ‘moral standing’ to sentient and nonsentient organisms.

On this view of moral standing, whatever other reasons might exist for giving preference to sentient over nonsentient beings, it is not because the argument for moral standing is ‘analogical’. The good of health in a plant is *the same good* as the good of health in a swine, just as the good of pleasure in a swine is *the same good* as the good of pleasure in a human. As Bentham understood the situation concerning pleasure and pain in humans and animals, we should understand the further extension of moral standing outlined above. Pain in my cat and pain in my arm are both instances of pain. Health in me and health in a pole pine are, likewise, instances of the same thing. We are now in a position to understand EII above as extending to all living things. The claim that all living things are equal amounts to the claim that their like interests should be given the same moral weight.³⁸

V. SUPERIORITY RECONSIDERED

We are now in a position to reassess our understanding of Mill’s claim that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a swine satisfied. Mill’s insight, of course, is that a life which includes the good of intellectual pleasures is superior to a life which lacks that good (even if that life contains other goods.) The point, put more

generally in terms of the pluralistic axiology advanced above, is that a life which includes a broader range of goods is superior to one which includes fewer goods. This suggests a natural sense in which members of some species can be said to be superior to others. Members of a species are superior to members of another species just in case they have more goods proper to them. The definitions of species equality and superiority which follow can be used to capture this last claim:

- EIII. Members of species, S1, are equal to members of species, S2,
 =df Members of S1 and S2 have the same number of goods proper to them.
- SIII. Members of species, S1, are superior to members of species, S2,
 =df Members of S1 have more goods proper to them than do members of S2.

At this point we must address several questions concerning the above definitions.³⁹ First, how are we to individuate goods? Second, given that the discussion of Part IV links goods to capacities and interests, how will we be able to avoid the conclusion that members of all species are equal? After all, if one provides an account of capacities or interests which is sufficiently fine-grained, it would seem that each organism has a potentially infinite number of capacities and interests, and, hence, an equal number of goods. Finally, if one succeeds in avoiding the second problem by providing a suitable account of capacities and interests, can we avoid the equally counter-intuitive consequence that a flying fish is superior to a herring, or that a human-like creature with the ability to fly would be superior to other humans? These questions are related to one another. In what follows, I will make some general observations about the questions and, finally, I will suggest a framework from which they might be provisionally answered.

The first question is, of course, the most fundamental. I have noted above⁴⁰ that nothing short of a complete analysis of the concept of 'goods of one's own' is required for its solution. I will not offer such an account here; I will merely attempt to forestall the question. It is worth noting that the above critiques of the concept of inherent worth and of the hedonistic axiology of classical utilitarianism show that there is a plurality of goods. Thus, our first question should not be taken as a rhetorical denial of the plurality of intrinsic values. It is a serious philosophical query. What seems to generate the concern with the individuation of goods in the present context, however, is their connection to capacities and interests. This concern is expressed in the second and third questions above. Answers to these latter questions will not provide an answer to our first question but they will suggest that the particular version of axiological pluralism articulated here faces no special difficulties in virtue of its grounding of goods in capacities and interests.

I turn to the second and third questions. Indeed, the goods we have been considering are grounded in capacities and interests. What is *not* claimed in the above axiology is that *every* capacity or interest grounds a corresponding

intrinsic good for the organism in question. It is only on this assumption that the counter-intuitive consequences envisioned in the questions are realized. In the second question, it is supposed that if capacities are fine-grained, there will be a corresponding number of goods. The third question posits a good for features such as flying (or for any other capacity that differentiates one individual from another). The initial response to both questions is the same: while some capacities define intrinsic goods proper to an organism, not every capacity does. Hence, members of every species are not equal, EIII, at least not in virtue of a fine-grained description of their capacities. Further, the flying fish is not superior, SIII, to the herring (unless the capacity to fly defines an intrinsic good for the flying fish). The flying human is not superior, SIII, to the normal human in as much as the capacity to fly does not define an intrinsic good for humans.⁴¹

The observation that there are capacities which do not ground intrinsic values for individuals, while answering the above questions, leaves us with a set of additional difficulties to consider. Which capacities do define intrinsic goods for organisms? Why these capacities and not others? Are the good-defining capacities species specific, specific to the individual, or are some shared by all organisms regardless of species and others not?

I will only comment briefly on these important issues here. The axiology presented here does imply that *some* goods are shared by all living things and that some are not. It is an open question as to whether some goods are specific to individuals. In the human realm, there is some reason to think that this is the case. Some goods seem to be species specific though it is worth noting that this might be a mere matter of fact and not a necessary truth about either the goods or the species in question.

To give content to the claim that some goods are shared by all living things (and others not), a classification of goods is required. The classification I offer provides only the most general characterization of common and differentiating goods. It is not meant to preclude further more refined articulations of the goods in question. For the purpose of providing a preliminary classification of goods I turn to an unlikely source. I say 'unlikely' because this philosopher is infamous as a speciesist. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides a bio-psychological account of human nature. According to this view, humans share certain very important aspects of their natures with plants and with nonhuman animals. The goods of life (simpliciter), nutrition and growth or, roughly, health are the goods associated with what Aristotle called our *vegetative nature*. These goods we share with all living things. In addition, there are the goods proper to our *animal nature*, roughly, the goods of perception, satisfaction of desire, and bodily pleasure. These goods we share with a wide range of animals.

Finally, there are the goods proper to our *cognitive nature*. These goods include the skills of practical reason, the attainment of knowledge for its own sake, aesthetic achievements and contemplations, moral virtue and, no doubt, others.⁴² Concerning these last mentioned goods, it is worth noting that we need

not accept the factual claim that they are peculiar to human beings. Nor need we accept Aristotle's view that the moral realm is confined to some limited range of these goods.

One final clarification is worth making: while I have taken the classification of goods from Aristotle's account of human nature, this classification is in no way anthropocentric. Or, I should say, the classification is anthropocentric merely in an *epistemological* sense. From an *ontological* point of view, the goods are human independent (unless, of course, there happen to be some goods peculiar to humans). Aristotle is careful to remind us that often the order of knowing and the order of being are not the same. It follows that the goods, as I have outlined them, are literal goods of members of other species. From the Aristotelian point of view, we are all vegetables; we are all animals. It is just that we are not merely vegetables, not merely animals.

The *epistemic* primacy of human goods is helpful, however, in formulating an answer to our remaining questions: which capacities define intrinsic goods? Why these and not others? If, as the Aristotelian model suggests, there are underlying generic unities in the realm of living things, we can understand how our knowledge of our goods can be extended univocally to other living things. To some extent this allows us to identify *which* capacities define intrinsic goods. This is the point of the reformulation of Attfield's argument in Part IV above. *Why* these capacities (and not others) define intrinsic goods proper to an organism can only be answered in terms of an objective assessment (generally found in biology) of the nature of the organism. In the human case, I believe that biology confirms what we know, in an epistemically privileged way, to be our goods.

I conclude, then, that *prima facie* sense can be made of the sense of species superiority defined in SIII. We have now arrived at one understanding of Mill's claim that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than the swine satisfied. The justification for the claim, however, does not depend, as it did for Mill, on one good being qualitatively superior to another good. Rather, the view presented here is that Socrates is the Swine-Plus; and it is better to be the Swine-Plus (even dissatisfied) than the swine (satisfied). And it is better to be the swine dissatisfied than the elm tree the interests of which have been satisfied, *mutatis mutandis*.

Of course, not much else follows from this sense of species superiority. In fact, we should hurry to make qualifications on the case of the dissatisfied Socrates. It might be better to be the healthy swine than say Socrates in such a dissatisfied state that his pain is intense, his cognitive capacities undermined with no relief, save death, in sight. And while this understanding of goods supplies intelligibility to our intuition that if forced to choose between the life of a healthy cat and that of a healthy pole pine, *ceteris paribus*, we should opt for the cat, issues such as the use of animals in research are left less clear. Still, the understanding of species superiority advanced here is compatible with EII which might reasonably be adopted to help us understand the range of our obligations.

Whatever those obligations turn out to be, we can be certain that on this view of species superiority the following claim made by Taylor is *false*:

To conceive of [other living things] as ... inferior beings would mean that, whenever a conflict arose between their well-being and the interests of humans, human interests would automatically take priority.⁴³

In a recent paper, Karen Warren points out that claims to superiority are, by themselves, insufficient to justify the domination of the sort here envisioned by Taylor.⁴⁴ Warren's position is at least true for SIII. The point is at once a logical one and one of great moral importance. The claim that humans are, for example, superior, SIII, to prairie dogs does not entail that humans would be justified in subordinating them. One would have to offer some argument for the hypothetical claim to that effect.⁴⁵ That such an argument is not forthcoming is evidenced by the fact that SIII is compatible with EII. EII, together with the likely hypothesis that in some cases the interests of prairie dogs would outweigh competing human interests, entails that we are sometimes obligated to act in the interest of prairie dogs.

NOTES

I would like to thank Dale Jamieson, Chris Shields, Chris Cuomo, Claudia Card, David Yandell, and an anonymous referee of this journal for their many helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p.10.

² Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 22.

³ Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, p. 155.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁵ Dale Jamieson, "Rights, Justice, and Duties to Provide Assistance".

⁶ The term 'axiology' refers to the foundational assumptions within an ethical theory concerning what things or states of things have moral value in and of themselves. For example, according to classical utilitarianism, pleasure and only pleasure is good in and of itself. That claim constitutes the axiology of classical utilitarianism. Kant's claim that nothing can be conceived as being good without qualification except a good will, can be viewed as an articulation of the axiology of his moral theory. Some philosophers espouse moral theories without foundations; such views will not be considered in this paper.

⁷ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p.10.

⁸ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, p.100.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1, 71-2, and def. 75. It seems incoherent that while we can draw evaluative conclusions from X's having inherent worth, we cannot draw such conclusions from X's having a good of its own, especially when, according to Taylor, "having a good of one's own" is sufficient for having inherent worth. Further, I see no reason why evaluative

conclusions cannot be drawn from the ‘fact’ that a being has a good of its own. For the sake of argument, however, I will assume that there are more plausible reasons for introducing the notion of inherent worth. Instead I will focus on another, more telling, difficulty with Taylor’s introduction of ‘inherent worth’.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3. Taylor insists that these activities, unlike hunting and trapping, must not be intrinsically incompatible with the attitude of respect for nature. The distinction between being intrinsically incompatible with the attitude of respect for nature and merely being harmful to wildlife is, by itself, incapable of justifying actions of the latter kind. This should be evident from the fact that building a library may be, and be known to be, far more destructive to wildlife than shooting a pheasant for sport. It would be ludicrous to say that with respect to the issue of our treatment of animals, the former is permissible while the latter is impermissible, merely because the concept of the activity ‘building a library’ is not incompatible with the above understanding of respect for nature. The issue must surely include, if not hinge on, the actual harm done and not on its conceptual status under some description of the activity. Taylor, of course, reflects this, if only after the fact, by insisting that such actions be carried out with *the least actual ill effects*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

¹⁴ The suggestions offered by Taylor that we relocate the prairie dogs or, if that is not possible, that we do something to benefit some other prairie dogs are unsatisfactory. The first suggestion implies that the attitude of respect for nature is compatible with the destruction of habitat for other species so long as the encroachment is slow and methodical. The second suggestion undermines Taylor’s earlier claims for the value of individuals as such; one cannot show respect for individual A by doing something for individual B while at the same time destroying A.

¹⁵ Louis Lombardi, “Inherent Worth, Respect, and Rights”.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, pp. 147-52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Italics added for emphasis by author.

²⁰ There may be, after all, some other way of introducing the notion of inherent worth that both avoids the above difficulties and yet has the consequence that members of all species are equal. For example, Tom Regan introduces this concept at least partially on the grounds that such a notion is unavoidable for explaining certain *prima facie* difficulties with utilitarianism. And, by the argument from marginal cases, he argues that all beings with inherent worth have equal inherent worth.

²¹ Tom Regan and Peter Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, p. 78.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

²³ Donald VanDeVeer, “Interspecific Justice”.

²⁴ I omit, for the sake of brevity, the third provision of VanDeVeer’s account in which peripheral interests are related to more basic interests. None of the criticisms which follow are affected by this omission.

²⁵ For a parallel discussion of possibilities of this sort see Atfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, pp. 174ff.

²⁶ VanDeVeer, “Interspecific Justice”.. See section “Two factor egalitarianism explored”.

²⁷ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, p. 138.

²⁸ One might conclude from an argument such as Taylor’s that the good corresponding to

every interest is of equal value, considered it itself and not in relation to members of the species for which it is a good. In fact, I support this understanding of the goods associated with natural interests. This will become evident in what follows.

²⁹ Robin Attfield, "The Good of Trees". Much more needs to be said in support of this claim. In particular, one must answer objections, such as those raised by Janna Thompson, that this criterion for moral standing includes far too much. For example, why should trees have moral standing and not thermostats, buildings, and tractors? Why should trees have moral standing and not organs which make up organisms, hearts, leaves, and eyes, for example. The answers to these important questions go beyond the scope of this investigation of the the concepts of species equality and superiority. What must be shown is that the counter-intuitive examples, while having goods proper to them, do so in a derivative sense. Nothing short of an analysis of the concept of 'goods of one's own' is required. See Thompson 1990.

³⁰ William David Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Chapter 5.

³¹ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, chapter 1. I have in mind his discussion, in Part B, of the distinction between 'good' and 'the good'.

³² Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, p. 153.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

³⁵ I thank the anonymous referee of this journal for suggesting this interpretation of Attfield's claim that the argument is 'analogical'. While some of Attfield's remarks suggest this interpretation, I find equal plausibility in the interpretation discussed below. In either case, as will become evident, I reject Attfield's claim that the argument is, in either sense, 'analogical'.

³⁶ Attfield, "The Good of Trees", p. 52.

³⁷ Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, p. 153.

³⁸ Attfield defends a version of this principle in Chapter 9 of *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*. What remains to be seen is how this axiology of goods could be made to account for moral differences in treatment among species. For a partially parallel account of such differences see, Robin Attfield, *A Theory of Value and Obligation*, Chapter 5, and the closing remarks of this paper.

³⁹ I thank the anonymous referee of this journal for raising the penetrating questions which follow. They help bring considerable clarity to the issue of the relationship between capacities, interests and goods presupposed in the version of axiological pluralism advanced in this paper.

⁴⁰ See Note 30 above.

⁴¹ Presumably it was the recognition of this fact that led Mill to acknowledge the good of intellectual pleasure, grounded in a uniquely human capacity, while ignoring the many other uniquely human capacities. This fact is also recognized by VanDeVeer, when he introduces the notion of a threshold point for the moral relevance of psychological capacities. At a certain point, according to VanDeVeer, some psychological capacities are of no moral significance; see Donald VanDeVeer, "Interspecific Justice", pp. 74f. I am simply making the more general point that not every capacity of an organism grounds an intrinsic good proper to the organism.

⁴² Panayot Butchvarov, *Skepticism in Ethics*, Chapter 5.

⁴³ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, p. 133.

⁴⁴ Karen Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism".

⁴⁵ Warren states the hypothetical as follows: "For any X and Y, if X is morally superior

to Y, then X is morally justified in subordinating Y.” The rejection of various instances of this hypothetical is, she claims, “the bottom line in ecofeminist discussions of oppression”. Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism”, p. 129

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