Intrinsic Value: A Modern Albatross for the Ecological Approach

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ABSTRACT

The idea and use of the concept of intrinsic value in environmental ethics has spawned much debate in environmental ethics/axiology. Although for many, it seems fundamental and necessary for formulating an ethic for environmental protection, it seems to confuse and even undermine such efforts. 'Intrinsic value' is, I argue, a concept born in the Western intellectual tradition for purposes of insulating and isolating those to whom intrinsic value can be attributed from one another and their environmental context. This is especially true from the Modern period onward. When used as a basis for determining moral considerability, these Modern foundations engender contradictory and self-defeating ways of thinking about the individual/ecosystem relationship. As a result, formulations of moral sensibilities and principles become self-defeating and, vis-à-vis the ecological context, incoherent. On the critique of this Modern residue, an alternative axiological framework is built, using Anthony Weston's idea of interdepending values as a preparation for a more ecologically coherent approach to environmental protection. This approach is dialectical and attempts to formulate an ecological foundation for moral considerability.

KEY WORDS

Intrinsic value, interdepending values, ecological approach, Modern world view, person, environmental protection, community

Debate over the importance of attributing intrinsic value to nature, whether focused on non-human beings or ecosystem wholes, has animated the field of environmental ethics since the 1970s. Recent attempts (for instance, by Nicholas

Environmental Values **12** (2003): 317–36

Agar[1]) at defending the attribution have renewed the debate. Bryan Norton, a central detractor, denies the need for intrinsic value, arguing from a utilitarian perspective that environmental protection is better served by a careful consideration of preferences.[2] Other utilitarians (e.g., Baxter) argue for strategies of optimal pollution and use of non-human species as the best way to protect the environment, partly on the grounds that people simply think and value this way; humans cannot, practically speaking, think in terms of or act in accordance with the intrinsic value of nature.[3]

Defenders of intrinsic value, while in agreement over the importance of ascribing intrinsic value to nature, nevertheless, disagree among themselves over what such ascriptions mean. John O'Neill, in his 'Varieties of Intrinsic Value', begins sorting out the disagreement and the many senses in which the concept of intrinsic value is used. He sorts its use under three main formulations: 1) non-instrumental value; 2) the value a thing has in virtue solely of its intrinsic properties (non-relational properties); 3) value determined independently of valuers.[4] Where detractors seem to hold the edge when attacking one of these senses (e.g., (2) or (3) which tend to be seen as objective formulations), defenders often attempt to salvage one of the other senses (usually (1) which tends to be seen as a subjective formulation) in such a way as to retain efficacy in the arena of environmental protection. For instance, O'Neill, after describing and criticising claims about and uses of 'intrinsic value', concludes with an Aristotelian formulation. Intrinsic value is constitutive of certain goods; e.g., caring for people for their own sake, not merely for the pleasures or profits they might bring, is constitutive of friendship.[5] While principally subjectivist, his formulation has a communitarian element which O'Neill uses to cut between the objectivist/subjectivist polarities so as to retain association with obligations to protect.

Like O'Neill, I am concerned to retain a strong relationship between value theory and normative commitments to environmental protection. Unlike him, however, I attempt to move the debate onto a different plane, by showing how the two objective formulations are self-defeating – especially when attempting to advance an ecological approach in environmental ethics – and unnecessary for environmental protection. On balance, its use undermines environmental protection. Part of this undermining influence is owing to Modernist residues in the asserted connection between 'intrinsic value' and 'person' which reinforces tendencies to think about those to be protected as fundamentally detached from their environment and deserving of insulation against it. This residue promotes the opposite of what is intended – recognition of and living with a more comprehensive moral community. Such Modernist theories also reinforce the idea that persons are paradigmatic sources of value; in so doing, they contribute to the misidentification and misanalysis of persons and the conditions of moral considerability. In turn, the critique obviates the need for a subjectivist formu-

lation of intrinsic value and guides the advancement of an ecological axiology and different ethical responses to environmental protection.

I. THE DOMINANT PARADIGM CASE STRATEGY: WORLD VIEW CONSIDERATIONS

Nicholas Agar's use of folk psychology is a useful place to begin. Agar explicitly appeals to what has long been implicit in paradigm case strategies. Critique of his approach, then, helps reveal how these strategies retain Modernist assumptions against emerging ecological analyses of the person/environment relationship. One who retains these Modernist assumptions can be likened to a general who is to defend a fort, but ignores the geography of the area. Agar's approach, in brief, is to adopt folk psychological value assumptions about persons as intrinsically valuable as a basis for constructing a defence for protecting other species. Since most people assume persons to be intrinsically valuable and science seems to provide evidence that other species share the same intrinsically valuable psychological conditions as persons (especially intelligence), he claims, we are compelled to acknowledge the intrinsic value of these species.[6] Since intrinsically valuable, they are also possessors of an inherent right to life.[7]

Agar believes his approach to be more effective than radical ones – one suspects he is targeting deep ecologists, social ecologists and ecofeminists, among others – precisely because it appeals to a tradition (liberal and democratic) that has been effective in expanding the class of those deserving moral protection. As a self-described conservative thinker, he believes that radical thought detaches the thinker too much from ordinary and deeply entrenched sensibilities. Such thought is unlikely to find purchase in the thinker's own application to real world environmental problems or in persuasion of others.[8]

A number of thinkers have offered metaphysical defences of intrinsic value in ways that complement the paradigm case approach. Callicott, for instance, concedes that, from a scientific point of view, the source of all value is human consciousness; human persons are paradigms of the conscious subject who is capable of valuing something for its own sake. Non-humans, then, are not valuable in-themselves (i.e., independently of the valuer).[9] This strongly entrenched view appeals to axiological intuitions, perhaps first articulated by John Locke: the value of a natural object is determined by a human being (person) taking an interest in it, mixing his labour with it, or agreeing with other persons that it should be worth so much (as in the case of gold).[10] Recognition of worth by persons remains the central condition of value, in this case, as the source of value, rather than as the paradigmatic repository of intrinsic value. Callicott articulates a paradigm of value conference, rather than a paradigm of value ascription. The former is prima facie compatible with the latter, where it is

assumed that personhood is the *sine qua non* for the existence of value. This combined paradigm is used to structure a subjectivist defence for the intrinsic value of the environment. However, with some modification – e.g., by adopting Agar's use of science – the use of this paradigm can be expanded to support ascriptions of intrinsic value to non-humans, once they are shown empirically to share morally essential properties once ascribed only to human persons. The convergence of these two defences for the intrinsic value of nature reinforces Agar's conservatism.

Furthermore, these traditional theories of value ascription and conference appeal to a long-established conceptual map, which influences, if not determines, dominant moral and axiological sensibilities. Something in those we call 'persons' seems to compel moral respect. These sensibilities operate as primitive moral assumptions or even self-evident truths. Criticising Agar's conservatism, then, would seem ill-advised. However, if this conceptual map suppresses or falsely represents important aspects of the human/non-human relationship, or causes us to ignore metaphysical implications of ecology/evolution concerning how persons are constituted and related to other beings, then adopting it is likely to misdirect thinking about environmental protection and policy. Our thinking will target the wrong things to be protected or prescribe inappropriate protective measures. If the conceptual 'geography' forming the context for understanding personhood invokes a complex of sensibilities best suited to an outmoded world view or to a culture that suppresses the sensibilities associated with persons of other cultures, then the paradigm case strategy could turn out to be historically regressive, self-defeating and its application imperialistic. One way to begin identifying the problems with the conceptual geography is to answer the question: 'What if the normative assumptions of the Ptolemaic world view, however sensible they might have seemed during the millennium (approximately 500 B.C.E. to 1600 C.E.) during which it dominated, had never been challenged and we had continued to live according to normative assumptions that the dominant sector thought were self-evident and challenges to them imprudent? Further, what if proponents of the Modern (Copernican) world view, which replaced the Ptolemaic (astronomically, cosmologically and metaphysically), had retained basic metaethical assumptions about the source of moral values (e.g., divine authority)?

If history had taken such a course, as it did for many early Moderns, we would find ourselves espousing a metaethic whose cosmological supports had been abandoned. While the Ptolemaic hierarchical geocentric cosmology supported the hierarchical theocentric moral system, the developing Copernican cosmology and concomitant epistemological developments (the non-hierarchically structured heliocentric solar system and scientific method) placed severe strains on that normative system. This development destroyed the convenient fit between prescriptive and descriptive elements of the Ptolemaic world view. Copernican cosmology, in a manner of speaking, 'flattened the cosmos' and the

introduction of the scientific method challenged the need for an ultimate authority for knowledge claims. A non-hierarchical system of cosmological explanation and a more democratic (public) system of knowledge acquisition were made possible and eventually became the norm. To have retained the prescriptive hierarchy and its authority-based epistemology would have suppressed the democratisation of moral life and liberal sensibilities over and against metaphysical and epistemological developments in just about every other arena of life. The critical method of inquiry would have been demonised in ethics, while celebrated in these other arenas.

This thought experiment places the discussion about intrinsic value onto the plane of world view analysis. Like the Copernican Revolution, the emerging ecological approaches can be counted as responses to an emerging shift in world view at a grand scale.[11] The historical dimension of this experiment shows how liberal sensibilities emerged in relation to the dissolution of the Ptolemaic world view. To rely on folk psychological or apparently self-evident truths about the person–value–moral sensibility relationship, then, is not to rely on ahistorical or trans-historical moral sensibilities. We should then be prepared to see this relationship challenged as grand-scale shifts in world view are once again occurring.

II. A SHIFTING AXIOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY AND MORAL SENSIBILITIES

Anthony Weston indirectly[12] helps to challenge liberal axiological assumptions by showing what could replace theories of intrinsic value. He introduces an axiological model that takes values to be dynamically interdepending with other values.[13] He takes issue with the means–end analysis of values in which, according to the likes of G.E. Moore, there must be some intrinsic value to which the instrumental values (means) aim, a kind of stopping point or source of values.[14] This way of thinking about values is modelled on the ancient Greek idea of a final cause or uncaused cause. As a final stopping point, an intrinsic value is a value in-itself, holding sufficient grounds of its own worth within itself. While not Moore's application, this conception of intrinsic value is traditionally attached to the concept of person as a repository, a self-contained and independent bearer, of intrinsic value. Weston, in contrast, asks us to 'consider a more holistic picture, according to which values are connected in a weblike way ...', a kind of ecology of values.[15] Although Weston denies the importance, perhaps even the usefulness, of using ecology as a 'grounding' for values, because of his commitment to pragmatism,[16] the fact that he uses the term 'ecology' to describe the interdependence of values suggests further analysis. The use of the term suggests parallels to notions of food webs and the idea that everything is connected to everything else. As such, nothing can be of value independently of

the web of values and, by implication, neither can the bearers, creators, or conferrers of values. If Weston's idea of interdepending values can be so expanded, not only can there be no starting point for valuations, no objectively intrinsically valuable beings, there can be no independent conferrers of value. Indeed, personhood would have to be described as belonging to a network of conferrers, most of whom would not be human. Although Weston denies the need for 'grounding', he appeals to Rolston's *Values Gone Wild* [17] to highlight the point that when we enter the wilderness on its own terms, we do not do so seeing the wilderness as a resource, but as a source of values. He uses the idea of source to reinforce the view that all valuers belong to an integrated system of values. He, however, rejects Rolston's connecting this kind of experience to intrinsic value; it is neither needed nor helpful.[18] Considerable confusion, then, seems to arise over whether and how ecology affects our understanding of intrinsic value and axiology in general.

While Weston's pragmatic approach seems intended to obviate the need to address the traditional connection between 'person' and 'intrinsic value', his reluctance to ground his axiology leaves his approach vulnerable to claims that persons have special metaphysical status. Defenders of intrinsic value do precisely this (as I will discuss shortly) over and against obviating moves critics might make. While this is no place to criticise the adequacy of pragmatism as a theory of truth, in light of the special status thesis, it seems insufficient to address the deeper theoretical and intuitive commitments of the tradition. It must suffice to say that Weston offers a coherent alternative model for thinking about values, but not a sufficient one for addressing the underlying paradigm case/folk psychological sensibilities to which the likes of Agar appeal.

I am also concerned about the metaphysics of personhood, because it seems necessary to ferret out tendencies to use 'intrinsic value' to promote the treatment of other living entities as analogues of human beings, thereby masking a deepening anthropocentrism. By assuming that all beings can be treated as human analogues, strategies for expanding the moral community utilise concepts and methods of justification that may turn out to misconstrue the human-environment relationship. In addressing this issue, the conceptual geography in which the concept of person is situated needs to be examined. And if the claim to be criticised is that the concept of person is grounded by a special metaphysical insight, then the conceptual geography needs to be addressed at a metaphysical level. To do this, I turn to the intellectual history in which the concept of person is assigned special status.

The intellectual origins of the traditional person–intrinsic value relation can be traced to Socrates and the ancient Greek philosophers. An insular concept of the person appears necessary in order to ground respect for persons and protection of moral principles against scepticism. Socrates (through Plato) – always, it would appear, with Thrasymachus looking over his shoulder –

searches for a kind of motivation for just acts that cannot be analysed in terms of self-interest. Such a motivation is qualitatively different from self-interest, because it belongs to a realm of motivations free of base human desire or social pressure. Justice, the activity of the rational person, is considered an end-in-itself, an activity of the divine and the highest pursuit of humanity. This type of activity, accordingly, is done for its own sake.[19] Recalling O'Neill's point, the same can be said of Aristotle's notion of friendship; it belongs to a realm approaching the intrinsically valuable. Like the activity of rational thought, or thought thinking itself – an activity of the divine – friendship, at the highest levels, is good in-itself, not because it brings reward or profit.[20]

With Kant, the idea is transformed from indicating a type of activity that is done for its own sake to a type of activity that is good in-itself, making the repository of that activity (reasoning) valuable in-itself. Arguing in *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant says:

> ... man and, in general, every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. ... Beings whose existence does not depend on our will but on nature, if they are not rational beings, have only a relative worth as means and are therefore called 'things'. On the other hand, rational beings are designated 'persons'. Such a being is thus an object of respect ...[21]

The value of human beings and certain of their rational activities cannot be explained or determined by reference to anything external to them, while non-human beings and other sorts of activities acquire value only by reference to some person as the source of value. Here, we have the systematically developed historic roots of the value ascription and conference theories of intrinsic value and one of the strongest assertions of objective intrinsic value. Together, Socrates, Aristotle and Kant have shaped our moral sensibilities concerning persons, their special axiological status and value conferring relationships. According to them, there is a clear distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values, the formulation of which seems designed to insulate ascriptions of intrinsic value against attempts to analyse such value as a sort of instrumental value. Insularity is supported by the metaphysical assumption that a fundamental duality persists between the worlds in which the two types of value belong (the divine vs. the profane; the rational vs. the sensual). This split is further supported by the general splitting of reality into two orders (the intelligible/rational vs. sensual/empirical). Kant, in particular, spends much time establishing an ideal moral world, in which the rational person is not only self-legislating, but through the demands of reason, is also self-motivating and capable of executing the moral law (the categorical imperative) independently of other motivations. This idea is that persons, qua intrinsically valuable agents, are self-determining autonomous units who are not only to be valued independently of any instrumental

value, but are to be recognised as capable of motivating action independently of external influences. As such, moral deliberation is not only insulated, but isolated from the effects of the sensual/empirical elements.

John Stuart Mill, in *Utilitarianism*, later argues that the values of the learned and high-cultured are the only values that ought properly to influence the morals and decision-making procedures in society. These persons' values are to be preferred, as foundations of moral and social value, because they are higher and nobler, characteristics associated with goods-in-themselves. Nobility, furthermore, is the sort of characteristic that only people with rational capacities can enjoy.[22] Thus, liberals who follow Mill tend to assume an axiology which insulates the high against the low – again taking the form of separating the rational from the sensual. In his *On Liberty*, Mill argues that rationality – the ability to use the intellect to self-correct – is the mark of individuality, since it describes the capacities that a being must have in order to be autonomous.[23] When reason is present in an individual, it is sufficient to make that individual a rights-bearer.

The much maligned – in environmental circles – Descartes forms this distinction into an extreme dualism, wherein rational beings are ontologically separate and detached from the physical realm. 'I possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I [that is to say my soul by which I am what I am] is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it.'[24] The intent is to articulate and defend an ahistorical account of the essential nature and importance of 'man' over and against the natural world. This ontological dualism constitutes a metaphysical scheme which provides a protective conceptual barrier against those who would try to explain away moral life as a derivative of the lower order of nature.

The assumed discontinuity between persons and non-persons, then, is deeply rooted in the metaphysical tradition represented by the most influential thinkers in Western intellectual history. Since this tradition is deeply entrenched in paradigm case and folk psychological sensibilities, critique needs to be aimed at the specialness of the special status of persons. Where this tradition begins to show stress fractures, even before ecology is considered, is in its actual ability to support the moral concern for persons it purports to protect. If persons are conceived as repositories of rational activity, qua individuals, they are, in principle, substitutable. As long as their substitution would not result in a net loss of reasoning in the world, individual persons do not matter in this moral scheme, except as instantiations of rational thought. If reasoning is that which is intrinsically valuable, and by its presence in the individual that individual is made inherently worthy of protection, then by its absence, the individual is not inherently worthy. As repositories, individuals turn out to be mere vessels in which reasoning resides or takes place. What we are actually protecting in this moral scheme is rational activity. The fact that rationality resides in humans with sufficient brain capacity is accidental. The implications of this analysis are, at

least, counterintuitive, since the tradition arising from this focus on persons is concerned with the autonomy of the individual and the tyranny of the majority over the individual. This metaphysical scheme for identifying what it is about persons that is worthy of special moral protection, then, fails.

The scheme also fails to identify and appropriately recognise why rationality or intelligence is treated as a ground of moral considerability. If rationality in-itself was actually taken to be sufficient to determine intrinsic worth, then the mere exercise of reason, as in the construction of a syllogism or mathematical equation, would be treated as sufficient to engender moral considerability. Sociopathic and cold, effective and efficient military reasoning which demonstrated a complete lack of sensitivity to the injury of others (e.g. dispassionate calculations of collateral damage) should also, then, be sufficient grounds for assigning intrinsic value and an inherent right to life, when they can in fact constitute grounds for forfeiture. Since these applications of reason can evoke moral sensibilities that deny ascriptions of a moral character worthy of protection, rationality alone cannot be sufficient as a condition of moral considerability. Disclosing this incoherence also discloses a certain forcing of association between rationality and moral considerability. Where this association is intellectually forced, but remains deeply entrenched in folk psychology, it is likely something else is at work maintaining the connection.

A hidden assumption is at work in paradigm case strategies that rely on the connection between rationality, moral considerability and membership in the moral community: some criterion of appropriateness is involved in according reason intrinsic value. Only when reasoning is carried out in relation to a community that recognises actions as good/bad or right/wrong and esteems the good or the right does the capacity to reason carry moral force and worth. Even Kant's formulation of moral considerability assumes a community of agents who recognise this condition, insofar as being an object of respect presupposes the presence of at least one other agent capable of according respect. The existence of a moral community that recognises the goodness of rationally governed behaviour, then, is a necessary condition for rationality to have moral force. The significance of its exercise, as determined by the appropriateness of its contributions to a community, is the second condition that has to be satisfied. Hence, criteria of moral considerability are much more complex and belong to a much more complex system of relations than the traditional analytical framework identifies. And if appropriateness for a community is a condition of moral worth, then reasoning is not an end-in-itself, but a means through which recognition in a moral community is accomplished.

The tradition is wanting not only at the metaphysical level, it is also wanting at the level of moral purview. Appeals to folk psychological and paradigm case sensibilities, in their failure to analyse the community context, also fail to protect against unintended cultural biases. Note, for instance, that folk psychological notions of personhood in the East, e.g., Japan, do not connect rationality to

special concern. 'Person' does not represent the same characteristics as in the West. A word that is translated as 'person', *jin,* is not so closely tied to reason, which is often devalued (e.g., in Buddhist contexts), because productive of illusion. Persons do not so much exist as special repositories of value, but are points of reference to what does exist.[25] Neither are North American Aboriginal conceptions of human persons tied to independence and rationality. If, indeed, rocks and trees are persons and the rational mind is seen as misleading as much as clarifying (part of the reason for placing dreams and visions as important for gaining insight, information and verification of propositions), then the paradigm case strategy is only one among many possible folk traditions to which one might appeal. Success of the strategy, then, will either be restricted to those cultures that share the folk psychological sensibilities, or it will require a form of cultural imperialism to be a global strategy.

Carrying the conceptual geography of the tradition over to ethical theory we find other stress fractures. Paul Taylor's use of 'intrinsic value' – an implicit appeal to the traditional personhood model – exemplifies how this function operates. Since, according to Taylor, all creatures have intrinsic value (by virtue of having good for themselves), they have a right to life.[26] The only condition under which a life can be taken is that of necessity. If it is necessary for survival, then and only then is one justified in taking a life. Accordingly, eating is always to some extent evil, because it violates an inherent right, although violations are sometimes justified. Note, however, that what is justified is, in fact, a violation. There is something deeply incoherent about a theory that places us in the self-defeating position of being able only to minimise violations, rather than actually doing the right thing or producing good through acts necessary for living. Consuming other living beings for food is a basic fact of life and a good for those who consume. If an ethic condemns that good as a violation, we would be better off not being moral agents, since we would at least not be capable of intending to engage in violatory behaviour. Becoming amoral, if at all conceivable, would reduce the types of violations of which we would be capable by at least one factor.

More importantly, moral life is conceived always to be in conflict with the real world and the facts of life. If we follow the logic of Taylor's argument to its end, we find Stephen Sapontzis arguing that the right to life obliges us to protect even prey species from predation. Sapontzis' argument illustrates how the logic of ideal world thinking drives us to undermine real ecosystem relationships and replace them with ideal moral relationships. It justifies replacing ecological laws and relationships with moral laws and relationships. It prescribes the undermining of ecological goods in order that moral goods of individuals can be respected. This result is further evidence of the self-defeating nature of ideal world thinking, because it prescribes an undermining of the conditions of ecosystem integrity (a condition of individual well-being).[27]

The by now familiar line of critique, beginning with Regan and Singer and including critics Goodpaster and Birch,[28] shows that this system of decision-

making not only fails to cohere with real world conditions upon which moral life itself depends, it violates some of its own principles. In order to specify some condition of moral considerability, we have to determine what properties will count as morally significant. Goodpaster and Birch have shown that identifying any such property is not owing to some self-evident truth; it is owing to a decision we make. Whatever factual differences between types we wish to specify as morally significant, our choice is arbitrary. So, either we violate the principle of non-discrimination by drawing an arbitrary line between morally considerable and non-morally considerable creatures, concluding that nothing is morally considerable, or we must assume all beings to be morally considerable, that is, have intrinsic value, and face Taylor-like traps. However we might try to justify harm or violation done to others, we face the Goodpaster/Birch critique.

If it isn't the selection of the property that is arbitrary, it will be the selection of the moral principle. Take Singer's argument for instance. Why does he ignore the desire to live or the desire to flourish in accordance with a being's good-for-itself in favour of the ability to suffer as the morally relevant condition? Is it simply owing to a mentoring history traceable to Bentham? If everything struggles to survive, why not focus on the right to life? Since everything seems to seek the good-for-itself, why not the right to flourish? Given that this moral scheme is designed to avoid arbitrary exclusion or morally worthy beings, the fact that the system of thinking (methods of justification, identification of morally relevant conditions) leads to arbitrary decisions concerning principle selection is reason to suspect that something about the context in which moral life is situated has been ignored or distorted at some basic level of analysis. With paradigm case strategies, it appears to be the analytical framework – one that requires identification and isolation of criteria of moral considerability and suppression of the community context – itself that is at issue.

If determining criteria of moral considerability cannot be achieved by identifying and isolating properties to which moral significance can be assigned without being arbitrary or self-defeating, there must be something wrong with the conceptual maps to which we appeal when seeking guidance in moral thought. What is missing in the way we think about persons and moral considerability is a proper appreciation for the complexities of context. The same could be said for the way we think about identifying essential properties of moral considerability. When trying to determine conditions of moral considerability, assumptions about living in a moral context ride along. Whether we are concerned about personhood and intrinsic value or properties to which we ascribe moral considerability, we assume that we are situated within a community context and are trying to identify what makes it a moral context. It is this community context that remains under-analysed when formulating the conceptual 'geography' of the relationship between persons, value and community. We therefore need a radicalisation strategy that better takes this geography into account. If much of the conceptual geography of the folk psychological and

paradigm case strategies is traceable to Modern roots, then a good way to start a radicalisation strategy would be by examining the implications of ecology and evolution for reformulating a conceptual geography.

Since 'person' is such a core concept for moral thought, it can serve as a key concept around which the community/moral context can be examined. I propose the following: ecologically and evolutionarily speaking, persons belong to a system of interdepending values, where all valuing activity is part of a network of such activity. Persons are, therefore, transmuters of values when they treat themselves as valuable or when they confer values onto non-human objects; they do not create values, because the system as a whole is the source of values. Rather than being repositories of intrinsic value, persons are 'loci of valuational activity'.

It is worth noting that this way of modelling also allows for the retention of anthropocentrism via the notion of locus – the fact that all human beings must value from a human perspective – although anthropocentrism now becomes a perspectival 'centrism'. Anthropocentrism is a perspective, no more fundamental than any other perspective, because it belongs to a more comprehensive set of loci whose valuations affect the total valuational scheme. Each locus, in this scheme, whether human or non-human, contributes to the ways in which values are constituted, because each transmutes the network of valuations according to its perspective. Re-defining anthropocentrism as a perspectival cum epistemic 'centrism' will amount to, in a manner of speaking, a 'shallowing' of anthropocentrism, rather than a deepening. While rejecting the assertion that only human or conscious beings are sources of value, it reinforces the idea that all valuing for humans can only be done from a human perspective. Part of the tradition is retained, but part lost. Enough of the tradition is retained, however, to allay one of the most poignant fears of paradigm case strategists, eco-fascism,[29] since the re-casting of persons as loci can be shown to afford grounds for protecting individuals, perhaps in more adequate ways than can theories of intrinsic value (see Section IV).

III. AXIOLOGICAL INVERSION

Holmes Rolston III helps advance this ecological approach by showing how the idea of intrinsic value is problematic. He argues that the type of being we are, however conscious, intelligent and rational, is intimately connected to the evolutionary history of our society and ecosystem with which we have co-evolved.[30] 'Person' can no longer refer to an entity whose constitution and valuations are independent of and discontinuous with its physical and historical contexts. What persons are, then, becomes unclear as is their relationship to environmental values. Rather than being discontinuous, they seem continuous with such values. In a context where ecology and evolution form the pre-

conditions of moral life, a better approach to formulating basic moral concepts is to assume the significance of all conditions that determine the context of moral life in attempts to clarify what forms and informs that life. Understanding moral life, then, begins with an approach opposite to that of the paradigm case strategy; it assumes both a system of interdepending values and a community of interdepending members as loci of those values. It then proceeds to explain, not how non-humans can be included in the moral community, but how individual persons acquire moral value in community.

If we assume that there are no valuations or ecological conditions that are irrelevant to moral life, we see and understand the world as a moral world where everything can gain moral significance under certain conditions, or, when seen in a certain light, everything has moral significance. Just as we can assume everything to have a utility potential under certain conditions, however indeterminate that potential might initially appear, we assume everything to have a potential for moral significance. This is not merely an *a priori* assumption, since we know any relationship, however exclusively economic, casual or otherwise intentionally non-moral it may be in one context, can readily transform into a moral one (e.g., where one may be enticed to deceive, motivated to abandon or tempted to denigrate another in order to be successful in business). Further, situations constantly arise which can affect whether we gain power over others or become subordinate. When fully attuned to the range of possibilities of injury, insult, violation and the like, every situation does become a moral one, as we take care to conduct ourselves and to speak in order not to offend or violate others. So, seeing the world as a moral world does not require a new ecological foundation for understanding moral life, but it is more consistently grounded where there is one. It is to treat community as a given and the clarification and determination of our identities and values as persons in community as a primary moral task.

Again, a contrast between traditional – this time focusing on Locke – value theoretical commitments and an ecological one helps establish how community is involved in determining moral value. In *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke states, 'The intrinsick value of things, which depends only on their usefulness to the Life of Man; or [Men] had agreed, that *a little piece of yellow metal*, which would keep without wasting or decay, should be worth a great piece of Flesh.'[31] Locke means to say that a thing has value only by virtue of some human being taking an interest in it. This classical articulation of how the valuing community is formed assumes that the decisions and agreements of human rational beings form the system of value relations, such that nature, apart from humans taking an interest in it, is value-neutral. It also assumes a one-way value conferring process.

But since values interdepend, Lockeian axiology can at best be a partial explanation. It is a naive anthropocentric explanation. An ecologically informed explanation would situate human valuers, not in the position of creators of

values, but as those who recognise value potential. Take for instance, the value of a bridge over which we safely travel to get to work. In the design of that bridge, we rely on the existence of certain materials that have properties of resistance to distortion or breakage. We design with certain materials in mind. We do not create the values of resistance to breakage, but recognise the potential of these materials when valuing them. We do not confer the value of being poisonous onto a substance which we intend to use in an assassination plot; we, more precisely, recognise the poisonous properties property of the venom as effective for killing. If we could simply confer the value, we should be able to make water equally poisonous. The values of the objects are fundamentally related to 'properties' inhering in those objects. This is not to claim that values are objective properties that inhere in the object independently of the valuer. It is to claim that there is some property in the object which is amenable to certain value ascriptions. The value inheres in the relation between the valuer and the valued. Although relational, values are, nevertheless, established prior to any interest we take in an object or agreements we make between one another.

It would also be a wrong move to assert that values inhere in objects like properties (e.g., extension, hardness), because valuations, like running or becoming successful, are not properties at all, but are processes which we nominalise in calling them 'values'. The more primitive nature of valuations is that of process; and that process is a mode of engagement with the environment, in which valuations motivate or incline us and sometimes drive us to act. Identifying these motivations, or even powers, is not an act of detecting and measuring empirical properties; neither is it like, for the rationalist, identifying ideas, innate or otherwise, since valuations are concrete processes that take place in time. It is more like identifying a race, an activity, rather than a physical thing (although it has physical aspects) or non-physical thought (although it ideational aspects as well). The point is close to one made by Goulet about the Dene Thah language and its verb-orientation. The Dene Thah see the world more as event and process, rather than as a collection of things. Most nouns in the language are really nominalised action verbs. Similarly, the import of referring to what are normally called 'values' as 'valuational activities' or 'valuing' is to withdraw from the tendency to reify or treat processes and events as if they were objects. When the term 'value' is used, then, it would be a nominalised expression of the activity of valuing.[32]

Once we acknowledge that what we call 'values' are nominalised action verbs, we can re-think axiological assumptions in terms of relational processes that emerge in the interactive process between different loci, as they attempt to satisfy needs and discover the utility of various other loci. Hence, while, as Locke would have it, we do confer value onto other loci by treating them as useful in a way peculiar to human needs and wants, we are also constituted so as to value in certain ways, owing to our evolutionary and interactive histories with these loci, about whom the same can be said. As such, we do not so much act as sources

of value, but as transmuters of valuational activity and relationships. What we are, as loci, are members of an ecosystemic community of valuers. The only sense in which we create or are the sources of value, then, is in the act of synthesising valuations and transforming valuational relationships.

A counterfactual helps to underscore this way of seeing ourselves.[33] Had atmospheric constituents and evolutionary direction been different, our interests, needs and consequently values, would now be directed toward very different objects. They would also likely be directed toward satisfying these values in different ways. For instance, if our perceptual organs had evolved differently, our valuational activity might have been structured to be more amenable to our sense of smell (like dogs) than sight. We would then be inclined to detect objects in the environment in different ways. With nose to the ground for the most part, our relationship to the environment would 'appear' much different and our interactions with one another take on different dimensions. Imagine how different the advertising and entertainment industry would be, for instance. Continuity (not discontinuity) with evolutionary history and ecosystems in some fundamental way constitutes the nature of persons as loci; it largely determines how each type of locus synthesises the network of valuations that constitute its world, including the moral community. Continuity, not discontinuity, determines the conditions according to which each human locus acquires value in the community, seeks to act autonomously and counts others as deserving of moral considerability. Valuers, then, however special they may consider themselves to be, belong to a network of valuational activity, such that they owe their existence and valuational status to that network. With this description of the interdependency of values and the loci of valuational activity, we can now turn to describing how different members become morally significant.

IV. MORAL CONSIDERABILITY: INDIVIDUALS IN COMMUNITY

Shedding the albatross of intrinsic value has its price. How to proceed in determining the conditions of moral considerability is not entirely clear, although there are models that can provide leads (e.g., Aboriginal systems which identify all beings, including inanimate ones, as members of the moral community). There are also Buddhist traditions, which might help us articulate possibilities for formulating what constitutes moral considerability and how the moral community is to be shaped. For present purposes, however, re-thinking conceptions of personhood based on the critique of Western conceptions would be the better route to take, given my acknowledgement of conservatism. It also allows me to use the idea of transmutation. By using personhood as focal point, traditionally related moral concepts can be transmuted into ecologically formulated ones in a way that affords continuity with the tradition.

This transmutation involves inverting the way in which we conceive of persons, not as repositories of intrinsic value, but as derivatives of the system of interdepending loci of valuational activities. As derivatives, persons are best conceived as individuating processes of the whole. These individuating processes occur at many levels of organisation (systems, relationships, individuals). If a basic fact of ecosystems, then individuation is fundamental to the constitution of ecosystems and ecological communities. Thus, the ideas of 'locus', 'anthropocentrism' and 'interdepending values' are closely connected. As loci of interdepending values, persons are processes of individuation, which are, among other things, organisations of valuational processes. Such organisations have a perspective from which each acts as a nexus of valuational activity. This nexus is special to itself, because of its need to retain its organisation (to survive). Such need is connected to having a good-for-itself (which would explain how the notion of intrinsic value could develop when context is ignored). Having a good-for-itself is vital to the ecosystem as a whole, since it is a factor contributing to the development of unique, synthesising processes, which, in turn, constitute the ways in which the whole is integrated. But having a good-for-itself does not and cannot imply a good-in-itself or a value independent of all other values.

If to be a nexus is to be a unique value synthesiser and contributor to the whole, then each individuating locus has a type of autonomy by virtue of being more or less capable of acting for its own good by synthesising values and protecting itself from disvalues. This nexus, as a product of individuation, is both as a member of a species (being anthropocentric) and as a unique synthesiser within the species. As a member of a species, it is a product of both co-operation (e.g., through procreation) and competition (as in competing for a mate or food). As an individual, it must also both co-operate and compete. It must synthesise value (by eating and flourishing) and destroy value (by being a disvalue to others who must be consumed). What it means to be a locus of valuational activity, then, is thoroughly dialectical. This dialectical meaning extends to involve the relation between the individual locus and the ecosystem(s) to which it belongs. In some respects, the system nurtures and, in other respects, it destroys. Further, while the whole constitutes the condition under which individual loci come to exist, the activity of each locus contributes creatively to the constitution of the whole. Hence, the relationship between valuations of wholes and parts is as dialectical as is the relationship between parts and other parts; this complex relationship is more precisely what the system of interdepending values is. In contrast to Locke, then, an ecologically based axiology resists straightforward explanations.[34]

The analytical framework based on an assumption of creative interdependencies takes the process of becoming fully individuated, in the sense of growing and maturing to reach a potential, to be fundamental to the constitution of the community. According to this interdepending model, respect and protection of individuals is more coherently justified than in the traditional system. Since, by definition, it assumes the complexities of belonging to a moral

community, it treats the idea of belonging as more fundamental than the ideas of inherent right, autonomy or freedom. This comes as no surprise, since it has already been argued that these classical liberal ideas cannot find purchase in our moral sensibilities without assuming a community context. Taking the analysis of this assumption one step further, however, helps show how community is involved in the valuing of autonomy, freedom and the like. Autonomy, for example, while traditionally seen as a value for individuals, is so only in the context of a community that recognises the value of contributions by autonomous members. We raise our children to be autonomous, not so that they can isolate and insulate themselves against others, but so that they can contribute in creative and volitional ways to the community, while flourishing in that community. An ecological framework, then, better situates this assumption and makes it more explicit. But it also shows that this community is not restricted to human members. We may have to recognise human members differently from non-human ones, but we do not have to justify the inclusion of non-humans in the community.

This framework not only better explains the conditions that give rise to moral worth, it better discloses the conditions of how we are to live with the more comprehensive moral community. By requiring us to become attuned to the dialectic meanings of the nature of our relationships to one another and the systems of which we are a part, this approach places far more emphasis on disclosing the types of relationships, dependencies and tensions we have to one another and the comprehensive community of loci. It thereby helps us avoid self-defeating prescriptive pronouncements and imperialistic imposition of ideologies; it perhaps even helps avoid systemic hypocrisy. At the same time, it establishes a new set of problems for moral deliberation. It requires an expansion of moral sensibilities to recognise the contributions of all loci, setting, as part of moral obligation, a task of developing a more comprehensive understanding of how all other loci and levels of organisation contribute to the moral community.

A prescriptive sacrifice is inevitable with this approach, because disclosures of how each member is morally considerable, how individual/community relations are to be formed and how the value/disvalue relation is governed are bound to be underdetermined. The tensions between values and disvalues, as well as parts and wholes, demands attunement to the many facets of membership in the ecological community, as much as or perhaps more than adherence to principle. The need for attunement places us as rational beings in a position of decision-makers who must take whatever understanding we can attain and creatively apply it to judgments and decisions about how best to understand the moral community in attempts to protect it. Judgment and decision become of primary importance; the importance of theory is measured by how well it serves the process of making good decisions.

This approach to environmental ethics places us in a struggle to protect individuals and communities by acknowledging the tensions involved in direct-

ing judgment and decision toward the good to be produced. It requires, as supporters of deep ecology would put it, a 'total-field' approach in the attempt to understand comprehensively. Erazim Kohák, in his *The Embers and the Stars*, helps in this endeavour by showing how such an approach is not as alien to Western sensibilities as it might initially appear. He describes Plato's prisoner who struggles through the stages of *dianoia* (reasoning) to grasp in direct awareness the Good.[35] When *daionia* fails to attune our sensitivities to this ultimate and the world around us in all of the ways that have been given us, we are tempted to begin using it as we use synthetic medicines; although designed to help us heal, such medicines turn out to deaden our sensitivity. Kohák sees reason as a tool for leading us beyond the confines of constructing arguments and defending theories; its full exercise leads us to a 'sense of lived experience in its primordial immediacy as ... subject matter'.[36] Reason does not simply construct justifications for action; it has an underlying and perhaps antecedent drive to move us into a position where we are enabled to see clearly. The primary ethical task is determining how (not whether) individuals of all sorts are to be recognised as members of the moral community and how community is necessary to individual freedom, integrity, autonomy and the like, without having to appeal to moral absolutes.

NOTES

[1] See for example, Agar 2000.
[2] Norton 1984.
[3] See Baxter 1995.
[4] O'Neill 1992: 119–20.
[5] Ibid.: 133.
[6] Agar 2000:14–15.
[7] Ibid.: 53.
[8] Ibid.: 9.
[9] Callicott 1989: 133–4.
[10] Locke 1960: 335.
[11] I must rely on the general dissemination of developments in quantum physics, chaos theory and ecology as evidence for the fact that there is an emerging holistic world view that deeply challenges classical Modern notions of personhood. The Modern view of person I have in mind here is that of the atomic, detached (qua objective observer) individual who is ontologically separate from the natural world by virtue of its rational capacities. I provide a more thorough and complete discussion in my *Thinking Ecologically: Environmental Thought Values and Policy*, 2002, Chapter Three.
[12] Weston 1985: 332. He is not concerned to 'ground' values in the way that I am. He sees himself as advancing ordinary arguments for environmental values (334) through pragmatic reasoning. Hence, while my argument appeals to his with respect to interdependence of values, the intent of my critique is precisely to advance a metaphysical grounding for the interdependence of values.
[13] Weston 1985: 322.

[14] Ibid.: 328–9.
[15] Ibid.: 329.
[16] Ibid.: 335.
[17] Rolston 1983: 181–3.
[18] Weston 1985: 336.
[19] See Plato 1974, *Republic: Book II.*
[20] Aristotle 1962, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX.
[21] Kant 1969: 428.
[22] Mill 1979: 9.
[23] Mill 1947: Chapter II, line 150ff: 11.
[24] Descartes 1975: Meditation VI.
[25] Suzuki 1949: 277.
[26] Taylor 1986: 368–9.
[27] Sapontzis 1984: 36.
[28] This by now familiar line of argument, which can be found in many anthologies, is as follows: to establish moral considerability or inclusion in the moral community, thinkers attempt first to identify some morally necessary and sufficient condition (e.g., Regan, being a subject of a life; Singer, the capacity for suffering; Taylor, having a good-for-itself). The types of creatures who satisfy these conditions are assigned moral considerability (e.g., a right to life or right not to suffer). Goodpaster (1978) has shown that the presence or absence of these conditions is a matter of fact. He then questions why any one factual condition should be assigned moral consideration over any other and concludes that there is no morally legitimate reason to choose the presence of reason or the ability to suffer over being a self-organising system (like some crystals), as a condition of moral worth. Hence, any factual condition of moral considerability will be chosen arbitrarily. Thus, to avoid arbitrary discrimination, we need to assign moral considerability all the way down to self-organising systems.
[29] See, for example, Regan 1989 and Marietta 1993.
[30] See Rolston 1982.
[31] Locke 1960: 335.
[32] Goulet 1998: 71.
[33] A more extensive account can be found in my 'Holism, interest-identity, and value', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 1993: 52–3.
[34] A more comprehensive argument for this assertion is to be found in *Thinking Ecologically*, Chapter 4.
[35] Kohák 1984: xii.
[36] Ibid.: 1984: xi.

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