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# The Value of Nature's Otherness<sup>1</sup>

SIMON A. HAILWOOD

*Department of Philosophy  
Liverpool University  
7 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 3BX, UK  
Email: hailwood@liv.ac.uk*

## ABSTRACT

Environmental philosopher often paint a holistic picture, stressing such things as the continuity of humanity with wider nature and our membership of the 'natural community'. The implication seems to be that a non-anthropocentric philosophy requires that we strongly identify ourselves with nature and therefore that we downplay any human/non-human distinction. An alternative view, I think more interesting and plausible, stresses the distinction between humanity and a nature valued precisely for its *otherness*. In this article I discuss some of its main elements, and some of the difficulties involved with keeping nature's otherness in focus. Firstly (in sections 1–5), I try to clarify what I take to be the otherness-based position by distinguishing it from the apparently similar views of John Passmore, Robert Elliott and Keekok Lee, and some opposed holistic views, especially of J. Baird Callicott. Then, in the second half of the article (sections 6–7), I argue that if nature is valued in virtue of its otherness, this value is best thought of as an extrinsic, final and objective good, where 'objectivity' is a 'method of understanding', in Thomas Nagel's sense. Although I give some reasons for preferring an otherness account to certain alternative positions, I make no overall attempt to 'prove' that nature *is* valuable for its otherness. My aim is to show that, if it is, then this seems the best way to understand that value.

## KEYWORDS

Otherness, nature, holism, intrinsic value, objectivism.

## 1. OTHERNESS IS NOT STRANGENESS

Nature's otherness is not a wholly unfamiliar basis for its value. Much of the spirit of the otherness based view is expressed in these comments of John Passmore:

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...the philosopher has to learn to live with the 'strangeness' of nature, with the fact that natural processes are entirely indifferent to our existence and welfare – not positively indifferent, of course, but *incapable* of caring about us – and are complex in a way that rules out the possibility of our wholly mastering and transforming them. So expressed, these conclusions seem so trite and obvious that one is almost ashamed to set them out.

In general, if we can bring ourselves fully to admit the independence of nature, the fact that things go on in their own complex ways, we are likely to feel more respect for the ways in which they go on... The suggestion that we *cannot* do this, that, inevitably, so long as we think of nature as 'strange', we cannot, as Hegel thought, take any interest in it or feel any concern for it underestimates the degree to which we can overcome egoism and achieve disinterestedness. (Passmore 1975: 137-8, 140)

I think that Passmore's views here are important and basically true, but his use of the term 'strangeness' (from Keith Barth's phrase 'the strange life of beasts and plants which lies around us') is significantly misleading. He equates nature's strangeness with its 'indifference' to us, and lack of moral community with us. But 'strange' also suggests 'unfamiliar', and independent nature (the weather for example) can be familiar to us. In this sense, nature becomes less strange as natural science progresses. This is important for better predicting the consequences of human activity, which in turn is necessary for actively respecting independent nature. The notion of 'natural otherness', however, allows for this as well as for nature's indifference and lack of moral community. What is other need not be strange in the sense of unfamiliar. Passmore is right though when he points out that to emphasise nature's 'strangeness' (or as I prefer, its 'otherness') is to deny the existence of a *moral* community formed by humans and other parts of the biosphere. Thus although it does *not* deny physical or biological continuities implicit in evolutionary theory, for example, or the existence of 'ecological communities' of causally interdependent parts, it does repudiate the continuity implicit in the idea of humans, plants, animals, mountains and rivers '...involved in a network of responsibilities or a network of mutual concessions' necessary for ethical community (Passmore 1975: 140). I return to 'moral communitarianism' in section 5 below.

## 2. OTHERNESS AND 'NATURE'

Before proceeding further, some comment on the notion of 'natural' here would be helpful. There is of course a sense in which, possible abstract entities and supernatural beings aside, everything that exists and happens is 'natural'.<sup>2</sup> Mill denounced moral appeals to 'the natural', in this sense, as vacuous (Mill 1884: 32–3). Nevertheless, as Robert Elliot points out, the term is commonly '...modi-

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fied to mark a distinction crucially important to environmental evaluation'. He draws a distinction between the natural and the artificial, where 'artificial' refers to '...what is brought about, intentionally or otherwise, by human action' (Elliot 1992: 151). For Elliot 'naturalness' in this sense of 'non-artificial', is one (but not the only) environmentally important value-adding property, although this does not imply that artificiality is always value-subtracting, or outweighed in value (Elliot 1992: 151–2).

This value-adding property is close to that of nature's otherness, but the latter term has at least two advantages. Firstly, it usefully reduces the likelihood of conflating ethically vacuous and non-vacuous senses of 'natural'. Because 'nature' *can* mean 'everything (including human activity and its consequences) that happens', reference to something as valuable because *natural* might be dismissed as empty. If everything is valuable because natural, then singling anything out as valuable because natural is pointless. Such dismissiveness would be based on a mistake, of course, but one invited by treating 'naturalness' as the name of a value adding property. Secondly, as Elliot admits, his nature/artifice distinction is fuzzy because '[c]reatures other than humans are almost certainly higher order intentional systems and arguably some exhibit culture, social organization and rudimentary economic arrangements' (Elliot 1992: 152). The problem is that the likely existence of such creatures means that the nature/artifice distinction does not straightforwardly match the human/non-human distinction. Elliot's notion of naturalness would not apply to them. On the other hand, by emphasising 'not-us-ness', rather than non-intentionality, 'natural otherness' encompasses any such non-human creatures and their activities. Thus, if natural otherness is a value-adding property then (unlike naturalness as non-artificial) it characterises any intelligent, tool-making, cultural non-human organisms that exist.

In a later discussion, Elliot explicitly rejects otherness as a ground of nature's value, endorsing Bernard Williams' claim that sensing '...nature's otherness might engender pervasive and overwhelming fear' (Elliot 1994: 36; Williams 1992: 65). His thought is that, to work as a ground of value, otherness needs to be supplemented with an appreciation both of nature's aesthetic value and the fact that this value does not reflect 'intentional design' or 'purposive intervention'. He is certainly right that nature's otherness can provoke fearfulness, which should be distinguished from respect for it as such, and I shall return to this point below. Meanwhile, I want to make three points against Elliot's criticism of otherness as a ground of nature's value. Firstly, as just mentioned, it already encompasses absence of *human* design. Secondly, citing nature's capacity to evoke aesthetic responses as a necessary element of its value makes that value anthropocentric, against Elliot's own intention. Certainly, Nature's aesthetic value is a great blessing *for us*, and perhaps it can *help* us to overcome our fearfulness so that we can come to respect nature's otherness as such. However, this is to talk primarily about what is good for us, rather than what is good about

nature in itself. Consider that Elliot rightly allows that sciences like ecology contribute ‘... to the elimination of that fear of the natural which derives from bewilderment and the absence of understanding’ (Elliot 1994: 37). However, he makes this point *without* inferring ‘scientific value’ as a necessary element of *nature’s* value. If aesthetic value is a necessary accompaniment to otherness as a ground of nature’s value because it makes nature less fearsome, then ‘scientific value’ must be necessary also. But in both these cases – scientific and aesthetic – the focus has shifted away from nature as valuable for its own sake to nature as valuable in virtue of its capacity to evoke certain responses in us. Thirdly, if otherness is unsuitable because it *might* engender fear, it is unclear why otherness plus non-intentional aesthetic value should be suitable. Fear of nature’s otherness, its indifference to human purposes, is consistent with acknowledging such values, as when contemplating the *terrible* beauty of a volcano ‘thoughtlessly’ erupting as part of the vast processes of Earth’s carbon cycle.

Perhaps there would be less fear of commonplace, harmless spiders if they could be more beautiful scuttling across living room floors oblivious to human sensibilities. This raises again the fuzziness of the distinction between the human and non-human spheres. Consider another version of the distinction, outlined by Holmes Rolston (1995), this time invoking the notion of ‘landscape’. He contrasts ‘nature’ with the supernatural and with culture. A landscape though is ‘... the shape of nature, modified by culture, from some locus, and in that sense landscape is local, located’. Therefore, the notions of nature and culture are cut across by that of ‘environment’: ‘... the current field of significance for a living being, usually its home, though not always, should an animal find itself, for instance, in a strange environment ... [h]umans have both natural and cultural environments ... landscapes are typically hybrids’ (Rolston 1995: 379). This allows us to gloss ‘respecting nature’s otherness’ as respecting nature as it is independently of significances attributed within local landscapes. Still, it remains true that if landscapes are hybrids of natural and cultural environments involving the modification of nature, there is bound to be some difficulty saying exactly where landscapes and nature as wholly other begin and end.

### 3. OTHERNESS AND FRAGILITY, OURS AND NATURE’S

With this fuzziness comes significant fragility for nature’s otherness. Presumably every human intervention and artifice qualifies the otherness of nature, at least by altering the course things would have followed otherwise. Of more theoretical interest there is also a kind of intellectual fragility involved with the difficulty of maintaining natural otherness in view: the ease with which it is overlooked in the cultural process of feeling at home in a landscape. It is easy to identify nature and landscape in thought, to think of nature only as it features in

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our own landscape. In this sense, nature is vulnerable to the encroachment of landscape, not so much through a process like excessive gardening but through an intellectual oversight. It is an oversight because nature *as other* is not identical with any landscape. Nor does it physically determine one particular landscape in any given location. It imposes important constraints of course: a seafaring culture could not develop in the Himalayas. However, a coastline might accommodate a variety of different landscapes, from a coracle culture to a (properly regulated) trawling community, each with its own field of significance, set of modifications and interpretations of what is naturally, independently 'given'. Respect for nature's otherness implies remembering that nature provides no determinate blueprint to follow in the production and development of culture and accompanying landscape. Moral principles or, more broadly, 'ways of life', cannot just be 'read off' nature.<sup>3</sup>

Still, there are pointers to be gained from human activities with respect, and disrespect, to nature's otherness. Consider the statue builders of Easter Island who pursued their inter-clan rivalry in ceremonial statue building to the point that a densely wooded island was deforested and rendered too infertile to support that culture. An inward looking cultural obsession brought ecological disaster which in turn brought social disaster.<sup>4</sup> This illustrates an instrumental, prudential reason for keeping nature's otherness at the forefront of attention. The ecosystem of the island was not just there as a resource for statue production, or as an indefinitely willing backdrop to their rivalries. Valuing nature non-instrumentally, 'for itself', seems likely to buttress instrumental reason,<sup>5</sup> although this is still a matter of *our* fragility. Prudential (anthropocentric) concerns may accompany non-anthropocentric respect for nature's otherness, but should not be confused with it. Consider Keekok Lee's justification for respecting nature's otherness (Lee 1994). Her aim is to articulate a concept of value in nature encompassing but not confined to biotic nature, therefore not confined to the earth's biosphere. One that would, for example, provide grounds for refraining from 'terraforming' Mars, should that become possible (Lee 1994: 97–8).

Lee states three 'fundamental truths' recognition of which requires privileging attitudes of awe and humility, over arrogance and dismissive superiority towards 'the Other' (her term) that is nature. We should maintain a 'respectful distance' towards nature, avoiding '...excessive demands of any kind upon it, not only those to sustain ever-increasing consumption, but even those which express our love for it' (Lee 1994: 94–5). She equates this respect and humility with viewing nature as a 'locus of intrinsic value'. We shall see (in section 6 below) that, strictly speaking, this is a mistaken application of the notion of *intrinsic* value.

The 'fundamental truths' in question are, first, the 'No Teleology Thesis': nature exists 'for itself', without reference to human purposes. Given that we value ourselves because we exist 'for ourselves', consistency requires we do the same for nature. Secondly, the 'Autonomy Thesis' says that nature's 'origin and capacity for continued existence and function independently of humanity' imply

that we should recognise nature's value as similarly independent. Thirdly, the 'Asymmetry Thesis' rests on '... our total dependence on Nature, and Nature's independence of us, reinforces the Autonomy thesis and emphasises the independence of Nature's value' (Lee 1994: 95–6).

Unfortunately, this 'asymmetry thesis' suggests again the fearfulness Elliot associates with recognising nature's otherness; what Bernard Williams calls 'Promethean fear', '...a fear not just of the power of nature itself, but of taking too lightly, or inconsiderately, our relations to nature'. It reflects a

...sense of an opposition between ourselves and nature, as an old, unbounded and potentially dangerous enemy, which requires respect. 'Respect' ... not first in the sense of respect for a sovereign, but that in which we have a healthy respect for mountainous terrain or treacherous seas. (Williams 1992: 67)

Although more significant historically, Promethean fear cannot ground non-anthropocentric respect for nature's otherness. Such respect implies fear, not of the consequences for us of our own carelessness 'in the face of an old, unbounded and potentially dangerous enemy', but of the consequences for it of our carelessness and arrogance. Despite her endorsement of the latter in the rest of her account, Lee's asymmetry thesis seems more like a manifestation of Promethean fearfulness. For example, as she points out, the equilibrium of the inner solar system, including Earth's solar orbit requires the continued existence of Mars (Lee 1994: 98). But this is not true for, say, the fifteenth smallest piece of rock lying within ten miles of Mons Olympus. That rock, like Mars, satisfies the non-teleology and autonomy theses but, unlike Mars, it does not satisfy the asymmetry thesis. So the asymmetry thesis introduces an anthropocentric element; many things in nature, despite their independence of humanity, do not fall under Lee's account simply because humanity does not depend on them. Respect for nature's otherness is better understood to involve the no-teleology and autonomy theses without the asymmetry thesis.

#### 4. RELATIONS, WILDERNESS AND HOLISM

When considering nature's otherness it is important to recognise the relational character of the concept of otherness: something, A, cannot be 'other' without something else, B, to which A *is* other. Because of this, reference to nature's otherness presupposes our own existence. One cannot report the fact that natural processes occur *independently*, in the way that Keekok Lee does for example, without (at least implicit) reference to us. This conceptual relation does nothing to undermine the independent existence and otherness of natural processes and properties themselves (they would exist in our absence), although it is necessary to the *concept* of otherness. In this way the concept of natural otherness is like that of 'wilderness'. As John O'Neill has pointed out: 'To say 'x has value

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because it is untouched by humans' is to say that it has value in virtue of a relation it has to humans and their activities. Wilderness has such value in virtue of our absence.'

If it means something like 'an area untouched by humans', then 'wilderness' and 'natural otherness' look very similar ideas. But it is important not to confuse them, for although natural otherness encompasses wilderness in this sense, it has a wider scope. As mentioned already, it includes familiar things, such as the weather and arachnids, which are not always welcome within landscapes (perhaps partly because they tend to blur the boundary with wider nature). In fact, 'nature as other' can be present 'from the streetcorner to the stratosphere',<sup>6</sup> as well as beyond that to the edge of the universe. The streetcorner as such is not part of the purely natural environment of course, but even there natural entities encroach on our turf – the atmosphere, wild herring gull droppings, insects and so on – without transforming it into wilderness. Moreover, although it does not seem too much of a stretch to call outer space, beyond the stratosphere, a wilderness, it does seem odd to call the Earth's mantle beneath the streetcorner a wilderness, despite its otherness. Thus, *respecting* nature's otherness should not be understood only in terms of preserving wilderness, and certainly should not be equated with attempting the impossible – refraining from landscape construction altogether – because of a wilderness fixation. Limiting the destructiveness of human activity within landscapes can express the recognition that nature is not just there, 'given', for our purposes. In fact it may be that the 'environmental' consequences of human economics and international patterns of inequalities in wealth, power and development, provide a more fruitful practical focus than wilderness preservation for those motivated by respect for nature's otherness.<sup>7</sup> This is perhaps especially so when one considers how 'wilderness' has served cultural ends to the point where it virtually suggests a landscape in its own right – an extension of culture into the world. 'Wilderness' in this sense suggests a kind of suitable arena in which to realise specific values (for example, those of the rugged survivalist) peculiar to some cultural landscapes, or to recharge spiritual batteries flattened by the Modern World. This seems to be the case with the American National Parks as areas of preserved wilderness (Guha 1989: 68–70). Respect for nature's *otherness*, on the other hand, involves valuing independent nature for its own sake, not as a recreational space, or cure for alienation.

Still, like wilderness, natural otherness is a relational concept and it will be important to bear this in mind later when we consider the appropriate conception of the value it bestows. It is also necessary to mention it in order to emphasise the distance between this and the much stronger sense of 'relational concept' involved in holistic eco-philosophy. Treating nature's otherness as a ground of value is consistent with recognising many other grounds of value, such as those based on beauty, complexity and diversity, and on the needs and interests required for the flourishing of non-human organisms. However, because it



requires that we avoid identifying ourselves, and our culture, with nature, respecting nature's otherness is opposed to holistic philosophies which emphasise the opposite.

For example, it is hard to square respect for nature's otherness with the metaphysical holism associated with 'Deep Ecology'. 'To the extent we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness.' So writes Warwick Fox<sup>8</sup> in a holistic denial of the distinctness of nature, an approach often presented, for example by J. Baird Callicott, as the metaphysical 'implication' of ecology and quantum physics.<sup>9</sup> Its essence is said to be a 'doctrine of real internal or intrinsic relations', where relations have ontological priority over relata (Callicott 1985: 272).<sup>10</sup>

But in this case, respect for nature's otherness must be an obstacle to be overcome, or something to be replaced, by a radical identification with (what would no longer be) the other:

[A]s the implications of evolution and ecology are internalized... there is an identification with all life ... Alienation subsides... "I am protecting the rainforest" develops into "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking."<sup>11</sup>

Apart from undermining the notion of nature's otherness, one problem with this is that if what we think we do to nature we really do to ourselves, 'environmental concern' could never amount to more than distinguishing more or less enlightened versions of self-interest.<sup>12</sup> But this really seems to throw the non-anthropocentric baby out with the anthropocentric bathwater. As Val Plumwood points out, if ultimately I am indistinguishable from the biosphere, it does not follow that I will identify with it – I might identify it with me. A strong sense of nature's distinctness and independence (its otherness) is required for a sense of *its* value as opposed to mine or ours (Plumwood 1991: 158–61).

This seems true whatever current physics and ecology 'say' about relatedness. Whether, for example, the uncertainty principle undermines the subject/object distinction at the level of subatomic investigation, or organisms can be seen as 'temporary formations or perturbations in complex flow patterns' (Callicott 1986: 311). Although 'New Physics' and 'New Ecology' tend to paint a holistic picture of nature as a whole it remains possible to maintain a sense of nature's otherness (contrasted with the human realm). The distinction has its problematic fuzziness, but that does not mean we should try to dissolve it altogether. Moreover, even at the level of nature as a whole, current science does not *straightforwardly suggest*, let alone logically imply<sup>13</sup> metaphysical holism. It depends which bit of science is emphasised. The third law of thermodynamics says that 'entropy' is increasing within the physical universe. Why not work *this* up as an ethically charged metaphysical 'implication': we are that part of the system conscious of its role in increasing entropy?

## 5. COMMUNITARIAN HOLISM

Another holism is an ethic based on the notion of ecological community as moral community. Such communitarian, or moral, holism is also at odds with an approach focused on nature's otherness. As noted at the beginning of this paper, viewing nature as other involves recognising the lack of moral community over and above the causal interrelations definitive of ecological 'community'. Making shared moral community the vehicle of respect for non-human nature seems to require extending the notion of cultural landscape out into nature to encompass everything respected, thus negating the otherness relation. But it is most implausible to place ethical restrictions implying that non-members of 'our' community cannot be 'moral patients' for us, proper objects of our moral concern.

Nevertheless, communitarian holism is a very influential approach in environmental ethics. Callicott, for example, defends a 'Leopoldian Land Ethic', quoting with approval Leopold's declaration that '[a]ll ethics rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land' (Callicott 1984: 305). One thing this apparently overlooks is that communities cannot be enlarged, at least not properly, just *by decree*. Even within the human sphere, such decreed 'enlargements' ignore the hard cases, where ethics and morality shade into politics, of relationships between strangers, who are not part of the same concrete community (as opposed to some abstract, quasi-community such as the class of rational agents, or persons). Human beings are not all members of the same moral community, therefore members of 'our' ecological community (say the Earth's biosphere) are not all members of the same moral community. Consider how truncated and distant seems the notion of a genuine 'world community' (as opposed to a 'globalised' economy). The aspiration to build a world moral community is one to get all peoples (in different human communities) to modify local interests in line with some shared substantive norms. Realising this aspiration by decree, rather than negotiation and discussion, requires enormous morally problematic force. Assuming force is not an issue, 'enlarging the ethical community to include the land' can't even be an aspiration, unlike, say, 'enlarging the ethical community to include China', or 'persuading the world community to agree to an environmental ethic'. The Leopoldian notion of 'Land' is not like the world of humanity, only bigger and more diverse. It embraces the human and non-human, and obviously cannot become a moral community through discussion and negotiation.

Callicott's communitarian land ethic is largely a consequence of his preferred Humean/Darwinian value theory. He endorses Hume's sentimentalism as highly consonant with Darwin's theory of the origin of ethics, and Leopold's

incorporation of this into the land ethic: the next stage of social and ethical evolution is the extension of our sympathies beyond the species barrier towards all members of the 'biotic community' (Callicott 1984: 304–6). I argue below that Hume's *subjectivism* is an inadequate value theory to secure respect for natural otherness. For now it is worthwhile noting that given the Humean sentiment-infused communitarian land ethic, highlighting the metaphysical holist 'implications' of New Science might be intended to inspire and buttress the desired extension of sympathies. But if metaphysical holism is seriously intended as the truth,<sup>14</sup> not mere inspiration, then it is in severe tension with Callicott's communitarian holism. For example, denying the subject/object distinction is inconsistent with the latter's Humean/Darwinian roots: an analysis of value and morality ultimately in terms of the 'passions' of individual subjects as directed towards objects encountered or imagined. More recently, Callicott has suggested that theories incorporating this distinction may be transcended by a 'postmodern account of intrinsic value in nature' taking on board the deconstruction of the Cartesian subject (Callicott 1995: 16–17). Maybe, but in the meantime an otherness-based account seems preferable.

Interestingly however, there is an element of respect for natural otherness in Callicott's writings, in addition to the communitarian holism. It is implicit in his emphasis of the difference between wild and domestic animals. He rightly criticises the notion of 'liberating' domestic animals; for many as 'living artefacts', 'liberation' is logically impossible, and those achieving a successful feral existence would likely cause ecological problems in their competition with truly wild species. In this discussion he refers to the 'natural autonomy' of wild counterparts of domestic animals. The land ethic, he claims, generates a duty to respect the natural autonomy of wild members of the ecological community (Callicott 1980: 50–1). But given that nothing like *Kantian* autonomy is the issue here, the suspicion must be that such respect is really for the natural otherness of these creatures: their behaviour being determined by their own nature, 'indifferent' to us. The supposed existence of an overarching moral community embracing us and them seems beside the real point. Indeed the strand of otherness-based respect obviates the need to posit a moral community as a necessary vehicle of ethically significant respect over and above the ecological community. Moreover, once recognised, this respect need not be confined to particularly charismatic organisms such as timber wolves or mountain lions. Anything falling under Lee's non-teleology and autonomy theses would be morally considerable on these grounds.

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I want now to consider the interesting value-theoretic question: given that otherness is a 'value-adding property' for nature, what is the concept of value at

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work here? Firstly, is nature's otherness a ground of *intrinsic* value? The answer to this has to be no. Consider John O'Neill's point that 'intrinsic value' tends to be understood in one or more of three senses often conflated within environmental philosophy: non-instrumental value; non-relational value, possessed in virtue of non-relational properties; and objective value (O'Neill 1992). Non-instrumental value seems straightforwardly applicable if nature as other is valued for its own sake, not as mere means to another end, such as human interest. But this is not true with non-relational value. Before seeing this it is important to separate two importantly different distinctions, also commonly conflated: that between means and ends, and between intrinsic and extrinsic values. That these are different distinctions has been demonstrated by Christine Korsgaard (Korsgaard 1983). The means/ends (instrumental/non-instrumental) distinction marks the difference in the way we value things, either 'for their own sake' as ends, or for the sake of something else, as instrumental goods. The intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is more to do with the 'location' of the value than the way we do or should value things: intrinsic goods have their value 'in themselves', whereas extrinsic goods depend in some way on something else for their value. Because they belong to two different distinctions, ends and intrinsic goods should not be equated; it is possible to have ends in themselves whose value is extrinsic, not 'in themselves', in the sense of intrinsic. This latter, proper, sense of 'intrinsic' corresponds to the non-relational sense distinguished by O'Neill.

It is fortunate that there can be extrinsic ends because the value conferred by nature's otherness cannot be intrinsic in the proper non-relational sense. It must fall on the extrinsic side of the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction. As we have seen, although not at home in a holistic 'deep ecological' context, natural otherness is a relational concept. Value conferred specifically by nature's *otherness* is conferred in virtue of a relation holding between nature and us. This is a conceptual necessity, required by the meaning of otherness. But although it makes that value extrinsic, it does not thereby make it instrumental. Just as it is possible to value wilderness non-instrumentally (O'Neill 1992: 12–15), so natural otherness may be valued for its own sake, despite being irreducibly relational. Thus it may confer 'final goodness', but not intrinsic value.

Perhaps this is too quick. 'Non-relational' value is what G.E. Moore meant by intrinsic value as dependent on the intrinsic nature of an object. 'Intrinsic nature' here is a matter of non-relational properties, those retained even if the object were moved to a different world, or alternative causal system (Moore 1922: 265). Thus it might be argued, in a Moorean spirit, that the *intrinsic* value of natural otherness is the value possessed 'no matter what', by a whole comprised of us and nature related as other. Although otherness is a relational property, it is so only within an overall whole, which it defines, and to which it is intrinsic. However, this seems inappropriate, precisely because the value is attached to the whole package, including us. Focusing on *unities* seems to undermine the sense of apartness crucial to the notion of otherness. Respecting

this otherness involves holding on to the fact of nature's independent existence whilst discussing the appropriate conception of its value. Although difficult, partly because otherness is a relational property, this is important and apparently rules out conceptions that would stress the unity of us and nature within an overall whole, which itself is the ultimate bearer of the value. It seems paradoxical, for example, to ground respect for the 'natural autonomy' of a wild timber wolf on a conception of intrinsic value attached to a whole including oneself. This is even though its 'natural autonomy' is a manifestation of its otherness, its 'going its own (not my or our) way', a kind of not-us-ness, strictly inconceivable without our presence. Thus the Moorean notion of the non-relational value of a whole seems inappropriate, paradoxical even, given that we are talking about natural otherness, rather than for instance stressing our membership of ecological wholes.

#### 7. TOWARDS AN 'APPROPRIATE' ACCOUNT OF OBJECTIVE VALUE

Having decided that nature's otherness confers extrinsic, non-instrumental value, should we think of this as objective or subjective? I am going to argue for objective. Subjectivist environmental philosophers point out that although their analyses make value contingent on human 'attitudes' or 'sentiments', it does not follow that objects valued as ends must be limited to the human sphere: anthropogenic metaethics does not logically entail anthropocentric ethics.<sup>15</sup> This is true but it seems to miss the point, perhaps especially when nature is valued for its otherness. It is coherent, but unsatisfactory, to claim that the value of nature as other is contingent on subjective attitudes.

We have seen that if natural otherness confers value it must be extrinsic, dependent on our existence in that minimal conceptual sense. But although contingent on us in this way, it doesn't follow that nature's being valuable as other must be contingent on what our subjective feelings happen to be. There is a great deal of tension between (1) the view that nature is non-instrumentally valuable in virtue of its otherness, with this involving the autonomy and no-teleology theses, awe and respect for nature's independent existence and so on; and (2), the reduction of this judgement to an expression of subjective feelings of value. Respect for otherness seems to require at least that its value is not contingent on purely subjective attitudes, 'up to us' in that sense.

For example, we have seen that for Callicott Humean subjectivism provides the best value theory, at least given the tools of 'modernist' philosophy. Human sympathy is extendable to the non-human world. But the picture this suggests, of large numbers of anthropocentrically minded people being inspired, like sulky, antisocial adolescents, to take more of an interest in and acquire caring subjective attitudes towards, the 'wider community', seems a poor one. This is not only because of the problems with communitarian holism raised earlier. As

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Karen Green points out, subjectivism reduces questions of value to what is in fact valued by a majority of 'normal' valuing agents. 'If the majority see a leech filled ditch where others see a wild river of great value we will have to say that there is no value here because it is not recognised by normal observers' (Green 1996: 39). As she goes on to say, the problem is exacerbated by the standard subjectivist response to the objection that subjectivism cannot account for values in nature in the absence of valuing agents. The response is that natural objects may be valued by people living non-contemporaneously with them. Thus *we* now may value the continued presence of natural organisms after humanity's extinction. 'But suppose that, in the future, the millions of people who exist then in the world no longer value wilderness, and most people in the past did not value it, then the subjectivist environmentalist ought to admit that, though wilderness has properties which stir judgements of positive value in her or him, on balance it does not have value, because these properties do not induce judgements of value in the majority' (Green 1996: 39). The same point applies to natural otherness.

Otherness cannot be a ground of value without valuers to whom nature is other. The subjectivist *strategy* does capture a truth: nature then is just as other to us now as contemporary nature. But that strategy can only work to *secure* this value judgement as long as the value in question is not analysed in subjectivist terms. The subjectivist analysis leaves it vulnerable to particularly chronic fragility. Nature valued as other is nature valued independently of the interpretations internal to local cultural landscapes. This value judgement can be secured only if not 'subjective', only if not necessarily vulnerable to cultural variation between landscapes. The only way for the subjectivist to escape this would be for her to take the implausible step of positing a universal human sentiment – something like reverence for external nature – as a *de facto* brute component of human nature.

A non-subjectivist reading of the value of nature's otherness therefore seems preferable, although it is not a strictly logical implication of that value judgement. However, not all forms of value objectivism are appropriate in this context. For example, Moore identifies objective, non-natural goodness with intrinsic value (Moore 1903: 17). Objectivity is guaranteed by the 'necessary connection' between something's goodness and its intrinsic properties, their absolute lack of variation in line with external factors such as subjective attitudes. But as we have seen, in the case of the *relational* property of otherness, this value would have to be intrinsic to a whole including both nature and ourselves.

Another inappropriate form of objectivism here is Theism. Theism drastically qualifies otherness by implying continuity of landscapes and nature. For Theism, nature is objectively valuable through either being God or being God's creation, along with us, not in virtue of its genuine otherness. Insofar as relationship to God is emphasised, nature's otherness drops out as a distinct ground of value. In this sense, introducing Theism changes the subject: God is now doing the work.

Forms of objectivism which are inappropriate in this context, along with subjectivism about value, seem to highlight further the intellectual fragility of nature's otherness, as a ground of value. They do this by apparently threatening to replace the otherness relation with relations of continuity and dependence. For example, taking the natural world as valuable only as 'God's world', although an advance on treating it as valuable merely as *ours*, makes nature's value derive directly from something embedded in and animating many (although not all) human landscapes. With this in mind we could say that the view that nature's otherness confers non-instrumental value 'implies', not always with logical necessity, the inappropriateness of some positions in metaethics and value theory. This *value judgement* has here the status of a given to be clarified, and its implications explored. This situation is quite different from that of the metaphysical holism which takes certain *aspects of nature*, described by particular scientific theories, as givens 'implying' holism. Part of the notion of nature's otherness is that there are no such non-arbitrarily selected, determinate lessons definitely implied by nature.<sup>16</sup> That there is a strong temptation to overlook this is another aspect of its intellectual fragility.

Is there an 'appropriate' way to understand objectivity in this context? An important way of understanding value objectivity not considered so far is that of practical reasoning theories. This suggests Kant, but I will argue that Thomas Nagel's conception of objectivity is more promising. In purely Kantian terms, if nature is a final end in virtue of its otherness, it must be a 'conditioned' end. Kant's unconditioned/conditioned end distinction corresponds to the intrinsic/extrinsic value distinction.<sup>17</sup> For Kant only Humanity, or the Good Will, is an unconditioned end, with its value entirely 'within itself' irrespective of circumstances, although there are other *conditioned* ends (non-instrumental extrinsic goods) (Kant 1991: 17, 61–2). *Objective* ends are determined by reason, thus making claims on every rational will, irrespective of inclination. In terms of the unconditioned/conditioned distinction, something can be an objective end only if it is either unconditioned, or conditioned and the condition satisfied (Korsgaard 1986: 193). Assuming nature is an end for us in virtue of its otherness, it can be an objective end as long as we exist and the otherness relation holds. Thus Kant's approach has some attractions given the present exercise. Making the objectivity of value a matter of what reason dictates irrespective of contingent subjective inclinations, cultural circumstances and varying conceptions of happiness seems to cohere with the view of nature as other constituting an objectively valuable backdrop as it were, independent of cultural landscapes. Moreover, Kant's account usefully allows for a distinction between ends to be pursued as objects of desire or purpose, and negative ends, things not to be acted against, rather than things to be realised (Kant 1991: 99). Unfortunately it is only 'humanity' that is a negative end in this sense for Kant, and this points to some severe drawbacks with his philosophy given the present exercise.

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For Kant, humanity, or the good will – our capacity to choose freely our ends by means of reason – is not only the sole unconditional good, but also the source of all good. Kant's practical reason succeeds in finding its unconditioned condition – the metaphysical source of goodness is fully rational choice (Korsgaard 1986: 193). Given the present context it would have been better if, like theoretical reason, it had failed. Indeed the whole 'Copernican Revolutionary' tenor of Kant's philosophy seems inappropriate here. We are the unconditioned condition of objective goodness; we construct the empirical space time world through the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding; and we (our capacity for rational morality and culture) are the only possible final purpose of nature as a teleological system (Korsgaard 1986: 202). This is not a good system within which to place nature's otherness as a ground of objective value. Once again, to consider it as such serves to highlight the fragility of that ground of value. A more favourable seeming practical reasoning theory, and accompanying conception of value objectivity, is that of Thomas Nagel (1986).

For Nagel, 'objectivity' is a method of understanding from a detached perspective formed by stepping back from an initial view to arrive at a new conception taking in the original and its relation to the world. In the case of theoretical objectivity this brings a new or extended set of beliefs or conception of reality. In the case of practical reasoning an extended set of values or reasons for action is formed. Either way, the original view is relegated to 'subjective appearance', confirmable and correctable from the new more objective outlook. This process is repeatable and objectivity and subjectivity are both a matter of degree. 'A view or form of thought is more objective than another if it relies less on the specifics of an individual's make up and position in the world, or on the character or type of creature he is. The wider the range of subjective types to which a form of understanding is accessible – the less it depends on specific subjective capacities – the more objective it is.' Thus 'reality is progressively revealed' by 'gradually detaching from the contingencies of the self' (Nagel 1986: 5). For an evaluative outlook to be 'objective' is for it to be endorsed by another evaluative standpoint relatively detached from the 'contingencies of the self'. Nagel points out that the attempt to form ever more objective perspectives in this way can be taken too far in the area of practical reason. At the limit nothing matters from the standpoint of the 'view from nowhere'; nihilism about values follows from this maximal pursuit of objectivity. Normative realism therefore requires the retention of some relatively subjective element (Nagel 1986: 116–17). In principle the relatively subjective elements required to preserve values needn't be tied to the specifically *human* perspective, only to that of beings to whom things can matter. There is no necessary commitment in this to 'rational humanity' as the metaphysical source of all value. Nor is there any hint of humanity and human culture as the ultimate constructor and final purpose of empirical nature.



However, the relevant perspective here is the human one confronted by a nature both other and non-instrumentally valuable as such. This is perhaps one of the most objective of human value judgements. If true, it cannot be confined to the idiosyncratic viewpoints of particular individuals or groups: all human beings are confronted by nature as other whether or not they recognise it. As noted earlier, nature as other is present from 'the streetcorner to the stratosphere' and beyond. Again, every human intervention and artifice qualifies nature's otherness, at least by altering the course things would have followed otherwise, and a large proportion of the earth's land surface has been more or less 'landscaped'. Still, it is hard to think of any human 'environment' that contains nothing non-artificial: even submarines and spaceshuttles have some micro-organisms on board. The important point here is the general one that landscapes can be constructed with more or less sensitivity to local independent nature. The value judgement here – such sensitivity is good – must be consonant at least with the degree of objectivity required to recognise a nature not constituted entirely by the significance attributed within local cultural landscapes. In this way the objectivity of the value judgement presupposes a fairly considerable amount of theoretical objectivity. I mean that one must already believe that, *as a matter of fact*, there is an independent nature of which the no-teleology and autonomy theses are true. That is, one must have 'stepped back' from a perspective constituted entirely by significances internal to local, cultural imperatives: this valley is the place of our ancestors, that river is our vital water resource, that range of hills is our recreational space, under this ground lies our industrial raw materials, this animal symbolises our national character, that animal is a pest, that one provides good hunting, and so on. The value judgement that nature's otherness confers value, if true, presupposes such theoretical objectivity, and, as an objective value judgement itself must be relatively less subjective than those focussed only on cultural ends internal to landscapes.

If this is right, these relatively subjective perspectives will have to exist in tension with the more objective recognition of nature's otherness as a ground of respect for independent nature. Nagel's approach is useful here because of the emphasis he gives to the tension between subjective and objective viewpoints, without seeking either the elimination of the subjective or its complete subservience to the objective (Nagel 1986: 5–8). He distinguishes types of 'generality' which may characterise objective reasons. There is the 'breadth' reasons may have as expressed by principles which are general in the sense of applying to everyone; there is 'relativity to the agent', in that reasons containing no essential references to the people that have them are 'agent neutral', otherwise being 'agent relative'; and there is 'degree of externality' or independence of the interests of sentient beings. Reasons derived from the non-instrumental value of objects are in this category (Nagel 1986: 152–3). Although necessarily relative to humans, the reason to respect natural otherness seems to be general in the first two of these senses *because* it is external in the latter sense. This is so although the objectivity is not the maximal objectivity of the view from nowhere. But none

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of this means that less general and objective reasons, and the values they embody, must always give way to those more objective. This marks another improvement over Kant who connects value objectivity with the 'unconditional necessity' of the moral law. For Kant, objectivity is a much starker all or nothing affair: persons must revere the objective law or fail even to realise themselves as persons (Korsgaard 1986: 189–90).

Nagel's best known illustration of the fact that not all of reality can be accommodated objectively is the 'what it is like' of mental experience, which drops out of view in the process of achieving the degree of theoretical objectivity required to understand the world entirely in terms of physical laws and processes (Nagel 1974). The tension between perspectives applies also in the area of values and reasons. Like the 'raw feel' of experience they are invisible from a standpoint of objectivity constituted entirely by the science of physics. However, it is not just that physical objectivity ignores them in this way; subjective values should not be replaced automatically by those more objective. The claim is partly that ethical objectivity must be pursuable without too much disruption of personal life and of relationships constituted by relatively subjective and non-general values and reasons (Nagel 1986: 155–6). This is important here because the objective, general view that natural otherness is valuable for its own sake has to coexist with real anthropocentric imperatives, as well as different non-anthropocentric values. That we are 'naturally landscaping' creatures cannot simply be ignored: *it* is a fact endorsable from an objective standpoint. Perhaps an assumption that viewing nature as *objectively* valuable for its own sake requires the virtual suicide of human culture leads many to deny that objectivity. This assumption is false given Nagel's conception of objectivity.

It is also clear from this, though, that Nagel's approach does not solve all problems. Developing a relatively objective view of the world generates '... the new problem of reintegration, the problem of how to incorporate these results into the life and self-knowledge of an ordinary human being. One has to *be* the creature whom one has subjected to detached examination, and one has to *live* in the world that has been revealed to an extremely distilled fraction of oneself' (Nagel 1986: 9). He also discusses essentially the same tension using the terminology of 'personal' versus 'impersonal' standpoints. The resolution of this, which does not consist in outright victory for either side is, he claims, the central problem of political theory (Nagel 1991: chapters 1–3). We may view the extra 'impersonal' material introduced by valuing nature's otherness as making this already difficult task even more difficult.

However, if nature's otherness is an extrinsic end, there is a non-instrumental objective reason to limit intentionally the degree to which it is qualified by human activities. Notice though that this cannot simply be a case of respecting the interests of non-human organisms as revealed, from an objective standpoint, to be on a par with human interests. They may well be, but natural otherness is not confined to living organisms. Respecting the otherness of things with interests must require discovering what those interests are, and considering

them. But abiotic nature has no 'interests' to take into account (although of course biotic organisms have interests in its being in one condition rather than another). Still, respecting *its* otherness involves an objective recognition that the non-teleology and autonomy theses apply here also, and that it is not merely a human resource. For reasons already mentioned, the required human self-limitation should not be thought of on the model of 'extending the moral community'. Nor, also for reasons mentioned above, should it be thought of only in terms of 'preserving wilderness'. Presumably it can involve that, but it could motivate a variety of measures: limiting economic growth, limiting human-caused extinctions, the development of technologies making human ends pursuable with less disruption to ecosystems, and so on.<sup>18</sup>

There is no space here to discuss such practical measures in any detail. But I do want to reemphasise the 'intellectual fragility' of nature's otherness – the difficulty of maintaining it in view – as well as its physical fragility. Bearing the former in mind seems to me a necessary precondition of serious, sustainable, large-scale measures of human self limitation. As Simon Schama has remarked in a different context:

[l]andscapes are cultural before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock... But it should also be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming in fact, part of the scenery. (Schama 1996: 61)

If nature's otherness is to be remembered and respected, independent nature should not be identified with the significances attributed to it within local cultural landscapes; the organising myths of landscape should not be *that* much part of the scenery.

Finally, I want to remind the reader that I do not take my argument in this article to *prove* that natural otherness confers value. My aim has been to try to show some of what is involved in the notion of nature's otherness, and that *given it does* confer value, this is best thought of as non-instrumental, extrinsic and objective in Nagel's sense of 'objective'. This is not to make the (false) empirical claim that, even in their relatively objective moments, people in general do in fact recognise and value nature's otherness. Of course, if it is objectively valuable, then this is what we all should do.<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Stephen Clark, Karen Green, Pauline Phemister, and Jane Howarth for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Robert Elliot (1992: 151).

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Mill 1884, and Avner De Shalit 1997: 178–9. This point should be qualified. Nature's relative *neutrality* with respect to landscapes has some affinity with certain conceptions of politics. Identifying nature with landscape is like the mistake of identifying the just state with one substantive moral tradition. See Hailwood 1999.

<sup>4</sup> For a relevant discussion see Midgley 1996.

<sup>5</sup> For example see Callicott 1995: 4–5.

<sup>6</sup> David Cooper uses this phrase pejoratively to mark what he thinks is a too unwieldy concept of the (global) environment (Cooper 1992: 167). For a response see Belsey 1994.

<sup>7</sup> 'Pointing to intimate links between industrialisation, militarisation, and conquest, the Greens argue that economic growth in the West has historically rested on the economic and ecological exploitation of the Third World' (Guha 1989: 70). There is nothing in the notion of respecting nature's otherness that automatically privileges wilderness preservation over tackling these 'historical' issues.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Plumwood 1991: 158.

<sup>9</sup> See especially Naess 1973; Callicott 1985, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> The most influential statement of this seems to be in Arne Naess' (1973) characterisation of the 'Deep Ecology Movement'.

<sup>11</sup> John Seed, quoted in Callicott 1986: 316.

<sup>12</sup> Callicott seems to admit this (1986: 311).

<sup>13</sup> The lack of logical implication seems generally admitted. For example see Naess 1973: 98; Callicott 1986: 301–2.

<sup>14</sup> Callicott presents it as such (1985, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Callicott, 1984: 305–6; Elliott, 1985.

<sup>16</sup> But see again note 3 above.

<sup>17</sup> Korsgaard 1983, 1986. My brief discussion of Kant here owes much to her thorough analysis in the latter.

<sup>18</sup> See again note 7 above.

<sup>19</sup> For more positive arguments aimed at showing nature's otherness does confer value, see Lee 1994, and Hailwood 1999.

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