DOES ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS REST ON A MISTAKE?

1. Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics rests on a mistake. At least a common conception of what such an ethic must be like rests on a mistake. To make this clearer, I first explain this conception, then characterize and defend the charge I make against it.

Holmes Rolston, III provides a partial explanation of the conception I intend to examine. I quote from the opening passage of his magisterial work, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World.*

> That there ought to be some ethic concerning the environment can be doubted only by those who believe in no ethics at all. For humans are evidently helped or hurt by the condition of their environment. Environmental quality is necessary, though not sufficient, for quality in human life . . . Nevertheless, we are not here seeking simply to apply human ethics to environmental affairs. Environmental ethics is neither ultimately an ethics of resource use; nor one of benefits, costs, and their just distribution; nor one of risks, pollution levels, right and torts, needs of future generations, and the rest—although all these figure large within it. Taken alone, such issues enter an ethic where the environment is *secondary* to human interests. The environment is instrumental and auxiliary, though fundamental and necessary. Environmental ethics in the *primary* . . . sense is reached only when humans ask questions not merely of prudential use but of appropriate respect and duty [towards the natural environment].[1]

On my reading of this passage Rolston believes that an environmental ethic must illuminate, account for or ground appropriate respect for and duty towards the natural environment, and it must do this without placing primary importance on human interests. To make use of a distinction drawn in an earlier essay of mine, an ethic of the latter sort, one that places primary importance on human interests, would give us an ethic *for the use* of the environment (a "management ethic"), not an ethic *of* the environment.[2] The philosophical challenge concerns how to construct such an ethic—an ethic *of* the environment.

Some philosophers respond to this challenge by invoking the idea of intrinsic value. What is needed, these philosophers believe, is an account of the intrinsic value of natural entities (using the word 'entity' in a broad sense to include, for example, species, populations and ecosystems). Thus J. Baird Callicott in one place states that "the central and most recalcitrant

problem for environmental ethics is the problem of constructing an adequate theory of intrinsic value for nonhuman entities and for nature as a whole,"[3] and in another of his important essays makes the following observation:

> an adequate value theory for nonanthropocentric environmental ethics must provide for the intrinsic value of both individual organisms and a hierarchy of superorganismic entities—populations, species, biococenoses, biomes, and the biosphere. It should provide differential intrinsic value for wild and domestic organisms and species . . . and it must provide for the intrinsic value of our present ecosystem, its component parts and complement of species.[4]

The particular conception of environment ethics I intend to examine combines elements from the views expressed by both Rolston and Callicott. Such an ethic is (1) an ethic *of* the environment (as distinct from an ethic *for its use*), (2) an ethic that attempts to illuminate, account for or ground appropriate respect for and duty towards natural entities (again, using 'entity' in the broad sense noted above), (3) an ethic that attempts to illuminate, account for or ground appropriate respect for and duty to natural entities by appealing to their intrinsic value, and (4) an ethic that relies on an account of intrinsic value that attributes not only different but greater intrinsic value to wild in comparison with domestic organisms and species (this is what I take Callicott to mean by providing "differential intrinsic value for wild and domestic organisms and species"). Unless otherwise noted, whenever I use the expression "environmental ethics" it is this conception of an environmental ethic I have in mind.

To anticipate the main lines of my argument, I hope to show that this conception of an environmental ethic rests on a mistake. For there is no theory of intrinsic value that can do the philosophical work this conception imposes on it. I do not believe, nor do I wish to imply, that the particular conception of an environmental ethic I examine is the only possible conception or even that Rolston and Callicott themselves accept it in the unqualified way in which I have characterized it. What I do believe is that the conception under examination is both a natural and common one; thus, my hope is that, by explaining why it rests on a mistake, I might help those embarking on future explorations of the theoretical foundations of environmental ethics to avoid making it.

2. Preliminaries

Before turning to the business at hand two preliminary points need to be made. The first is terminological. More than intrinsic value has exercised the concern of philosophers who have endeavored to make a contribution to

environmental ethics. Paul Taylor, for example, goes to some length to distinguish intrinsic value from what he calls inherent value and inherent worth, explaining that his theory is partly grounded in the inherent worth of individual living beings, *not* intrinsic value.[5] In my own work on animal rights, moreover, I develop the idea of what I call inherent value,[6] and in another context argue that an adequate environmental ethic depends on a credible account of the inherent value of nature;[7] in neither case do I appeal to intrinsic value. Whether I am or Taylor is right about any of this is not the issue here; here I note only that, like Taylor, I have not appealed to intrinsic value as a basis for my theories. For present purposes, however, these matters can be set to one side. On this occasion I shall assume that anytime anyone judges that something is good in itself, is good as an end or has positive noninstrumental value, that what this judgment means is that the entity in question has intrinsic value. What I am interested in is not what we *call* the value we attribute when we judge that something has positive noninstrumental value but what role, if any, such judgments and such values might play in the conception of environmental ethics under examination.

My second preliminary point concerns theories of intrinsic value. These theories differ in a number of ways. Some (for example, hedonism) are monistic (one and only one thing is intrinsically valuable), others (such as Moore's view) are pluralistic (more than one thing can have intrinsic value). Moreover, some accounts of intrinsic value are offered as the sole ground of moral obligation (this is true of classical utilitarianism), others seem to concede at most *a* role to such values in the determination of our obligations (this is possibly true in the case of Rolston, for example, to the extent that he recognizes such values).[8]

In addition to these two familiar differences there is another which, though it is more fundamental than the other two, seldom is discussed in the philosophical literature regarding intrinsic value in general or the intrinsic value of nature in particular. This difference concerns what we might term (for lack of a better linguistic marker) the *ontology* of intrinsic value—a difference, that is, concerning the *types* or *kinds* of object deemed to have intrinsic value, whether one holds a monistic or a pluralistic theory and whether one does or does not ground all moral obligations in the creation of such values. My primary interest in the argument I develop below concerns the implications for environmental ethics of a critical examination of this ontological question. If I am right, attention to this neglected question reveals why an environmental ethic that meets the description offered earlier rests on a mistake.

3. Mental-State Theories of Intrinsic Value

Some theories of intrinsic value are *mental-state* theories. Hedonism is a classic example. When it is said that pleasure and pleasure alone is good in itself, it is implied that a mental state of a particular description, and *only* such a mental state, is intrinsically valuable. The basis on which the favored mental state is selected varies. A common argument appeals to the alleged impossibility of an infinite regress. Smith can desire A for the sake of B, B for the sake of C, C for the sake of D, and so on indefinitely. What Smith cannot do is desire things in this way infinitely. The process of desiring something for the sake of something else must come to an end. There *must* be something Smith desires for its own sake, not for the sake of something else, and whatever this "something" is, is intrinsically valuable.

Such arguments are less than convincing.[9] There is a certain axiological tidiness in the thought that people must ultimately desire some *one* thing for its own sake, but it is unclear why they must, let alone that they do. Granted, no finite person can have an infinite number of desires; still, it does not follow that we cannot desire things "as means" without limit (that is, without there having to be something that is desired for its own sake). The hedonist's view—that it is pleasure and pleasure alone that is intrinsically valuable—does not find support in the alleged necessity that something *must* be desired for its own sake.

Moreover, even if it could be proven that *something* must be desired for its own sake, it would not follow that there is *only one* thing that is so desired, or that this one thing is pleasure, or that whatever is desired for its own sake is intrinsically valuable. Looking back on the scarred and tattered landscape of Victorian repression it may hardly be surprising that radical thinkers like Bentham and Mill dare to hope that the sole good is (heaven forbid!) pleasure. Nevertheless, Mill's famous "indirect proof" of utilitarianism is deservedly famous for its failure to justify the answers hedonism favors in this quarter, and it is not without reason that Sidgwick, despairing of "proof" of any kind while continuing to lust after theoretical unity and simplicity, in the end claims to "intuit" the identity of pleasure and intrinsic value.

Questions of the possibility of proving hedonism to one side, it is unarguably true that most people prefer pleasure to pain, that some pleasures seem to have value apart from any future good to which they might give rise, thus seem to have positive non-instrumental value, thus seem to have intrinsic value. Indeed, if these modest claims did not have the ring of truth, the bolder claim—that pleasure and pleasure alone is intrinsically valuable—could make no purchase on our serious interest. That it

has made this purchase suggests that hedonists, whether their monism is true or not, at least are responding to widely shared judgments about our experience.

And there's the rub. Our widely shared judgments about our experience speak loudly against hedonism. The error of hedonism (or at least one error) lies not in judging that some experiences have positive non-instrumental value but in supposing that *only* pleasant experiences, or only the pleasure we find in certain experiences, have value of this kind. Experiences of awe and mystery, moments of uncommon appreciation and nostalgia, times when we have a deepened sense of our embeddness in our familial ancestry, in the evolutionary, ecological, social and historical dimensions of the world, episodes in or own history when we come face to face with our silly foibles, our puffed-up pride and nascent humility, our self-knowledge and self-deception—all these chapters in our psychic autobiographies mark moments of heightened value, "peak experiences" concerning which it seems inappropriate to insist on an answer to the question, "What are they good *for*?" The plain fact is, they may not be (they need not be) good *for* anything, they may not be (they need not be) good *as a means* to something else. Like all that is, these experiences are what they are and not another thing. And what they are can be of value non-instrumentally. It is, I think, this sense that some of our experiences have value apart from whether they lead to something else of value (which is not to say that they cannot do so) that is the experiential truth against which the remote plausibility of hedonism resonates.

But resonance against what is true is not the same as truth. It is false to our shared sense of valued experiences that the *only* thing of value in them is their pleasure. Indeed, some peak experiences (when we recognize our silly foibles or have insight into our puffed-up pride, for example) are anything but pleasant. No, hedonism is motivated not by a dispassionate search for truth but by a partisan search for what J. L. Austin might have called the "bugbear" of simplicity: *If only one feature* of our experience is good in itself, then how wonderfully simple our philosophical theories could be! "The good" might be added, subtracted, multiplied and divided with an ease and elegance that would earn the envy of the most exacting physicist. Alas, our actual experience is both larger and richer than our cramped monistic theories. So long as experience is given the opportunity to speak, pluralism, not monism, carries the day.

This cannot be good news to normative theoreticians who look to a mental state theory of intrinsic value for answers to normative questions. Even if it is true that some mental states have intrinsic value (and, as I have

indicated, I think our experience inclines us towards this view), it is false that there is some one quality that gives them the value they have. Thus, even if it were true that the ontology of intrinsic value was captured by one or another version of a mental state theory, the *plurality* of such values would work against the theoretical ideal of being able to add, subtract, or substitute one instance of intrinsic value for another. Theoretically, things are bad enough if in addition to the "quantities" of pleasures, for example, one attempts to incorporate their varying "qualities"; but things are much, much worse if in addition to the intrinsic value of pleasant experiences one also recognizes the intrinsic value of moments of awe and surprise. "How much pleasure is equal to a feeling of awe?" isn't a hard question to answer; it isn't a proper question to ask. When apples are added to oranges the result is not more oranges. Or more apples.

It sometimes is suggested that hedonism in particular and mental state theories of intrinsic value in general are anthropocentric. This is a mistake. In the present context anthropocentrism is the view that only the mental states of human beings have intrinsic value. The teachings of Bentham and Mill show why mental state theories can avoid this. Because in their view pleasure and pleasure alone is good in itself, and because they believe that numerous varieties of nonhuman animals are capable of experiencing pleasure, they recognize the intrinsic value of the pleasant mental states of these animals, not just those of human beings.[10] For Bentham and Mill there is intrinsic value *in* nature—for example, in the pleasures wild animals experience.

What hedonism in particular and mental-state theories in general cannot consistently recognize is the intrinsic value *of* nature, if this includes the positive noninstrumental value of wild species and organisms, populations, ecosystems, etc. Natural entities as such, assuming they lack the requisite psychological capacities, can have no intrinsic value given a mental-state theory of intrinsic value. Lacking a mind, species, populations and ecosystems lack the capacity to have mental states. Thus, populations, species, biocoenoses, biomes, the biosphere, our present ecosystem, its component parts and complement of species, to use an incomplete list of Callicott's full inventory quoted above—in a word virtually everything that exists in the cosmos lacks intrinsic value given a mental-state theory of intrinsic value. For this reason, even if for no other, a mental-state theory of intrinsic value does not hold much promise for an environmental ethic.

There are, however, other reasons why mental state theories are inadequate for such an ethic. For no pluralistic mental-state theory can illuminate, account for or ground *either* respect *or* duty, not only concerning

nature but more generally. Such a theory cannot ground respect, for the good and simple reason that *no mental state is an appropriate object of respect*. Moments of pleasure, awe, wonder and insight, let us agree, are good in themselves, are worth experiencing for their own sake—are, that is to say, intrinsically valuable. But there is nothing in these mental states themselves that can plausibly be thought to illuminate, account for or ground respect. That we like pleasure more than pain, that we find value in experiences of awe and wonder and insight—all this may be granted; but that *for this reason* we should *respect* these mental states should not. It makes sense (even if it should happen to turn out to be false) to say that Smith respects Jones's freedom or rights or privacy; but it makes no sense to say that Smith either does or should respect Jones's mental state of pleasure or awe or wonder. To put my central point in its most general form, mental states are not the right sort of entity towards which it makes sense to feel or have respect. To suppose otherwise is to make a category mistake.

Moreover, mental-state theories of intrinsic value are deficient for a second reason: *Appeals to the intrinsic values of mental states cannot illuminate, account for or ground our duties*, and thus cannot do this in the case of our duties to natural entities. Once we accept the plurality and incommensurably of intrinsically valuable mental states we must despair at the idea of being able to add, subtract and in other ways trade-off intrinsically valuable mental states. And once we accept this stark implication of the plurality and incommensurability of intrinsically valuable mental states, we must abandon the possibility of appealing to such values in the hope of illuminating, accounting for or grounding our duties in general, not just with respect to natural entities in particular.

Although this may be received as bad news by some moral philosophers, it is good news for those who aspire to develop an environmental ethic. The robust truth of incommensurable value pluralism does more than work against the possibility of erecting an ethical theory that illuminates, accounts for or grounds either respect for or duties to nature; this same truth undermines the *theoretical usefulness* of appealing to intrinsically valuable mental states in any normative theory. What I wish to claim, that is, is quite general. It is that no normative theory regarding what we ought to respect or what we ought to do can be adequately grounded in the production of intrinsically valuable mental states, and this for two reasons: first, mental states are not appropriate objects of respect and second, intrinsically valuable mental states cannot be aggregated in any intelligible or defensible way. If things were otherwise—if some form of value

monism could be vindicated, if this mental state could be shown to be an appropriate object of respect, and if ways could be devised for adding and subtracting the favored value, for example—then environmental ethicists would be hard pressed to explain why some *other* theory of intrinsic value is needed. As things stand, however, the theoretical poverty of mental-state theories of intrinsic value opens the door to the serious consideration of an alternative type of theory of intrinsic value and one which, because it is not limited to mental states, also leaves the door ajar for the development of a theory that might include the intrinsic value of natural entities. It is to a consideration of one such alternative that I now turn.

4. States-of-Affairs Theories of Intrinsic Value

Not all theories of intrinsic value are mental-state theories. Moore's theory, at least as we find it in *Principia Ethica*, may be a case in point.[11] In Moore's view intrinsic values can exist independently of anyone's experience. Moore believes this because he believes that (a) beauty is intrinsically good and that (b) beauty can exist without anyone's being aware of it. Because Moore's views regarding intrinsic value clearly imply that what is intrinsically valuable can exist independently of someone's being in some mental state, his views cannot be classified, as the hedonistic views of Mill and Bentham can be, as an example of a mental-state theory of intrinsic value. Instead, Moore seems to believe that certain *states of affairs*—for example, the beauty of a sunset at a given point in time—have such value whether a "mind" is present or not. For these reasons Moore illustrates a second kind of theory of intrinsic value, what will be termed *states-of-affair* theories.

While the two kinds of theory—(1) mental state and (2) states of affairs—are conceptually distinct, the latter can include the former. This is because the idea of a state of affairs is elastic enough to include mental states. By way of illustration: Given Moore's views, the state of affairs consisting of the beautiful sunset *plus* someone's admiring it *plus* that person's enjoyment, combined at a given time, is much better than the original state of affairs (the beauty of the sunset considered by itself). Thus, while mental-state theories of intrinsic value cannot consistently attribute intrinsic value to anything except mental states, states-of-affairs theories can consistently attribute intrinsic value *both* to states of affairs that include mental states *and* to states of afairs that do not. In theory, therefore, states-of-affairs theories of intrinsic value would seem to have greater potential than mental-state theories for accounting for nature's intrinsic values. The latter type of theory can at most attribute intrinsic value to mental states found in

nature (for example, the pleasures of wild animals). States-of-affairs theories, by contrast, seem able to recognize the intrinsic value of natural entities and thus seem to contain the resources for illuminating, accounting for or grounding respect for and duties to nature.

But appearances are deceiving. States of affairs theories of intrinsic value are as ill-suited to the development of an environmental ethic as are mental state theories, first, because *states-of-affairs theories of intrinsic value cannot illuminate, account for or ground respect for nature.* To make this clearer, suppose we follow Moore and accept the idea that beauty, whether in nature or in art, is intrinsically valuable. Even if we make this controversial assumption, it will not help. And it will not help because beauty is an inappropriate basis of respect. Granted, one can admire what is beautiful, one can stand in awe of it, one can enjoy or savor or appreciate it, but the idea that one should *respect the beauty in an object* strains our powers of comprehension. What can it mean "to respect a beautiful sunset" or "to respect a beautiful rendition of 'O Danny Boy' "? We can, of course, respect the skill or ingenuity of an artist or performer who, let us agree, creates a beautiful painting or gives a beautiful performance. In this sense we show respect by not interrupting the Irish tenor or defacing a Matisse landscape. Perhaps we can even show respect for God in this sense if we view the cosmos as a divine creation and do not alter (do not "interrupt," so to speak) the beauty we find in it. But none of this is the same as "showing respect for beauty." Because my eyes are uncommonly light-sensitive I am more prone than most people to have negative after images. Though in the nature of the case I cannot possibly confirm this in any public way, many of these images can last for a considerable length of time, are remarkably intricate and, I would say, quite beautiful. I have often admired them immensely and enjoyed doing so. In a Moorean spirit I am perfectly happy to say that the complex whole consisting of one of these negative after-images *plus* my admiration of it *plus* my enjoyment has more intrinsic value than if, say, I simply attend to such an image in a casual way. What I am not prepared to say is that I either do or should, or even that I understand *what it would mean to say* that I do or should, respect its beauty. So far as I can see the idea is unintelligible. Whatever beauty is (assuming it is something), it is not an appropriate object of respect.

However, even if I am mistaken in believing that beauty is an inappropriate candidate for illuminating, accounting for or grounding respect for nature, this will not save states-of-affairs theories of intrinsic value from a second, no less fundamental objection—namely, that *states-of-affairs theories of intrinsic value cannot illuminate, account for or ground duties to*

nature. It would take a prodigious argument indeed that managed to limit the intrinsic value of states of affairs to one and only one such value—say, beauty. Even Moore, who verily celebrates the intrinsic value of beauty, is more profligate than this, as well he should be. Indeed, given the fact that states of affairs can include mental states, the attempt to show that one and only one state of affairs (again, let us suppose this is beauty) is intrinsically valuable would have to include arguments that disqualified pleasure as something good in itself, and that reached the same conclusion in the case of moments of insight and awe and mystery. To put the point as conservatively as possible, the prospects of any argument's doing this are slim.

Moreover, problems of commensurability between intrinsic values will arise with a vengeance if, in addition to the intrinsic value of mental states, we also ascribe intrinsic value to states of affairs. It makes sense to say that beauty is good in itself. It also makes sense to say that pleasure is good in itself. But it makes no sense to say that the beauty of a dance or a meadow is equal to the pleasures of a warm bath or a cold beer. This is not to say (at least I am not saying) that beauty and pleasure are not intrinsically valuable. I am perfectly willing to accept the existence of these different kinds of intrinsic value. What it is to say (at least what I am saying) is that, assuming that there are these different kinds of intrinsic values, we must in the end acknowledge that they cannot be added and subtracted or in other ways treated as if they are commensurate with one another. Thus, no theoretical account of our duties to nature can offer determinate answers to normative questions *if the answers are supposed to depend upon producing or protecting what is intrinsically valuable in nature and if the theory presupposes that these values are commensurable and therefore susceptible of aggregation*.

Again, this may seem like bad news for those who aspire to develop an environmental ethic; again, appearances are deceiving. A state of affairs theory of intrinsic value is ill-suited to an environmental ethic. For consider: A state of affairs is just that—a state of affairs. And whatever else we might wish to say about this elusive, abstract concept it at least seems clear that many of the sorts of things to which environmental ethicists (for example, Callicott, in the passage cited above) have wanted to attribute intrinsic value are *not* states of affairs. I have in mind here not only the intrinsic value sometimes attributed to species but also the attribution of such value to ongoing ecological systems or communities of life. Of course it is possible that a balanced, sustainable and diverse life community lacks such value. Nevertheless, the attribution of intrinsic value, carried out in this more holistic fashion, is very common among environmental ethicists—so common, in

fact, that I am treating the making of such holistic attributions as in part definitive of the conception of environmental ethics under examination.

Suppose this is true. If it is, then the consequences are not good for those who hope to develop an adequate environmental ethic by relying on a state of affairs theory of intrinsic value. Sustainable, diverse and balanced systems of life are *not* states of affairs, any more than species are. One could, it is true, argue that a dynamic system of the sort described is a *series* of states of affairs. On this model an ecosystem is in a certain state at one moment, in a different state the next, and so on. But not only would this reduction of a dynamic system to a more or less long and complex series of discrete states of affairs seem to leave out the biological and ecological interconnections between any one state and its predecessors and successors (leave out, that is, its "internal relations"), thereby destroying its dynamic interconnectedness in the bargain, it is also arguable that the intrinsic value of the whole would be lost or distorted as well.

Something like this finding lurks in the corners of Moore's insistence that complex intrinsic goods are "organic unities" where the value of the whole is neither equal nor reducible to the sum of the value of the parts. To put my point in Moore's language, what all reductions of ecological wholes to states of affairs leave out are (a) the *unity* of the whole, (b) the value that attaches to it *as a result of* its unity, and (c) the "organicity" that characterizes how the various "parts" are interrelated, the one to the other.

Thus, given that an adequate environment ethic is obliged to illuminate, account for or ground appropriate respect for and duties towards natural entities, and assuming, first, that species and ecosystems (for example) are included among these natural entities and, second, that species and ecosystems are not states of affairs or summations of states of affairs, it follows that a state of affairs theory of intrinsic value is demonstrably not an adequate theory of intrinsic value for those who aspire to develop an adequate environmental ethic.

5. End-in-Itself Theories

A third alternative is what I will call end-in-itself theories of intrinsic value. For a variety of reasons this is not an altogether felicitous label, but some label is needed and despite its shortcomings this may be as good as any other.

Kant is representative of the sort of position to be considered. For Kant (to simplify his notoriously complicated views) certain individuals exist as ends-in-themselves, and those individuals who have this status, because they

have value in themselves apart from their value as means relative to someone else's ends, can be said to have intrinsic value.[12] There may be something to be gained by casting Kant's position as one among several alternative theories of intrinsic value. Even granting this, however, there would be no reason to permit the type of theory represented by his views to collapse into the other two distinguished to this point. For Kant, rational autonomous individuals exist as ends-in-themselves, and whatever sense we are to make of this complex idea, it at least seems evident that rational autonomous individuals are *not* the same as, not to be identified with and not reducible to, *either* states of affairs *or* mental states. Rational autonomous individuals, it is true, *have* various mental states and *are parts of* (can figure in) various states of affairs. But it is a tortuous metaphysic at best, and certainly one at odds with Kant's own position, that would reduce the rational autonomous person Dan Quayle is, for example, to the succession of mental states in which he finds himself or the states of affairs in which he figures. If we conceive of rational autonomous individuals as *the subjects* of various mental states and as *the persons* who figure in various states of affairs, then Kant's view seems to be that the intrinsic value these individuals have, as ends-in-themselves, is logically distinct from any mental state they happen to be in and any state of affairs in which they happen to figure.

Now it is important to recognize that, on Kant's theory, intrinsic value, applied to individuals as ends-in-themselves, is a *categorical* concept; that is, individuals *either* exist as ends-in-themselves *or* they do not, and among those who do none has this status to any greater degree than any other. For Kant, intrinsic value does not come in degrees; individuals are not more or less ends-in-themselves; all who are ends-in-themselves are so equally. It is not more or less wrong to treat ends-in-themselves as mere means; it is always and equally wrong to do so.

This egalitarian strain at the heart of Kant's theory marks it off as differing in a fundamental way from the implications of both mental-state and states-of-affairs theories of intrinsic value. Take hedonism, for example. Whether one is a "quantitative" hedonist like Bentham or a "qualitative" hedonist like Mill, one will deny that all pleasures are equally good. Some last longer, others are "purer" or more certain, perhaps some are "high" and others "low." Whatever the differences the essential point for any hedonist is that pleasures can and do differ in how much intrinsic value they possess—in the degree to which they are good in themselves.

The same is true of states-of-affairs theories. On Moore's *Principia* view, for example, a beautiful sunset of which no one is aware has *some* in-

trinsic value, while the complex whole consisting of this same sunset plus someone's admiration and enjoyment has *more* intrinsic value. This implication of states of affair theories of intrinsic value—namely, that different intrinsic goods *can differ in the degree* to which they are good-in-themselves—is radically at odds with the implications of an end-in-itself theory of intrinsic value.

Although his theory of intrinsic value implies that individuals lacking rational autonomy have no value in themselves, it would not be fair to Kant to characterize his position as anthropocentric. Kant clearly allows for the possibility that the universe might contain *other* species, in addition to *Homo sapiens*, whose members are rational and autonomous, and he clearly believes that, if this possibility turned out to be true, these extraterrestrial individuals would exist as ends-in-themselves.

While Kant's theory is not anthropocentric, its implications vis-à-vis the question of the intrinsic vlaue of the natural world coincide with those of an anthropocentric outlook. It is no doubt logically proper for Kantians to contemplate the possibility that E. T. and others of his kind are rational autonomous agents and, if so, that they exist as ends-in-themselves. But whatever may be true of extraterrestials, the Kantian case is closed regarding trees and rocks, streams and meadows, bison and beaver. They do not exist as ends-in-themselves. Among the denizens of the terrestial world only humans have such value.

In principle, however, there is no reason (or, to be less dogmatic, perhaps one should say that there *may* not be any reason) why end-in-itself theories must follow Kant in each and every detail. For example, I have argued that an alternative to Kant's criterion of rational autonomy is that an individual be "a subject of a life," meaning by this, roughly speaking, that the individual have a psychophysical identity over time and thus have an experiential welfare.[13] Whether this is correct or not, the important points to recognize are that (1) this *is* a species of an end-in-itself theory of intrinsic value, that (2) like Kant's theory it will be at odds with mental-state and states-of-affairs theories at certain key points (for example, with Kant, and in opposition to these other two types of theory, it will interpret intrinsic value as a categorical concept), that (3) unlike Kant's theory, the subject-of-a-life version will recognize the intrinsic value of many nonhuman animals, so that (4) one can develop an end-in-itself theory of intrinsic value that is decidedly nonanthropocentric in its implications. In this sense, then, one can retain the spirit of Kant's theory while abandoning the letter.

Indeed, one can try to go even further, as Paul Taylor has attempted in his masterly book, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*.

Like Kant, Taylor argues that certain individuals have intrinsic value.[14] But whereas Kant limits possession of this value to rational autonomous agents, Taylor attributes it to each and every individual living being, from the simplest unicellular forms of life to the most complex. For each is, in Taylor's view, a "teleological center of life." Moreover, again like Kant, Taylor can be interpreted to understand the concept of intrinsic value categorically: individuals either possess this kind of value or they do not, and among those individuals that do possess it, all possess it equally. Within the realm of intrinsically valuable individuals there is no more or less. In this respect Taylor's theory is at odds with mental-state and states-of-affairs theories of what is good in itself in the same way that Kant's theory is and for the same reasons.

Despite the differences noted between Taylor's theory and Kant's and my own, there is this fundamenal similarity: Each theory attributes (what I have agreed to call) intrinsic value to *individuals*—individual rational autonomous agents in Kant's theory, individuals who are the subjects-of-a-life in my theory, and individuals that are teleological centers of life in Taylor's theory.

End-in-itself theories of intrinsic value, when applied and limited to individuals, have an initial plausibility lacking in mental-state and states-of-affairs theories. To begin with, respect has a footing in end-in-itself theories. Perhaps Kant's theory is clearest in this regard. The recognition of the intrinsic value of rational autonomous agents arguably grounds the obligation to treat them with respect. Because such agents are ends-in-themselves, it is wrong to treat them merely as means—wrong, that is, to treat them as if their value could be reduced to their usefulness relative to our ends, our welfare, our purposes or our good, considered either individually or collectively. Whether I succeed in extending intrinsic value to nonhuman animals who are subjects-of-a-life or Taylor succeeds in extending it to all forms of life are large issues that need not be entered into on this occasion. The points to be made here are different: they are, first, that *if* either Taylor or I manage to succeed in this regard, there are strong presumptive reasons for believing that we cannot be any less successful than Kant is in grounding the obligation to treat the relevant individuals with respect, and, second, that there are no *a priori* reasons why either Taylor or I *must* be mistaken (no *a priori* reason, that is, why we *must* be mistaken in attributing intrinsic value to those individuals we do).

The challenge to illuminate, account for or ground the full range of moral duties, when intrinsic vlaue is applied and limited to individuals, is extremely difficult, especially when the resources of such a theory are asked

to resolve situations where our duties conflict with one another. Certainly Kant's theory has very serious problems in this quarter, as do Taylor's and my own. What each theory needs are secondary principles that (a) can be derived from the favored fundamental principle and that (b) can intelligibly and fairly resolve such conflicts. Two such principles in my own theory are the worse-off and the mini-ride principles. Taylor develops similar principles in his distinctive theory. Again, the adequacy of these principles is not an issue that needs to be explored here beyond reiterating a claim made just a moment ago—namely, that there are no *a priori* reasons why end-in-itself theories of intrinsic value, applied and limited to individuals, *must* fail to offer an adequate account of the full range of our moral duties to individuals.

Where such theories will be challenged, given the conception of environmental ethics under review, is in terms of their inability to do more than this. For the *difference* in the intrinsic value that is supposed to obtain between different natural entities finds no illumination in end-in-itself theories of intrinsic value, as is readily apparent from the following considerations.

Recall Callicott's statement, quoted above, that an adequate value theory for environmental ethics "should provide *differential intrinsic value* for wild and domestic organisms and species" [emphasis added]. From what has been argued in the preceding it is clear that both mental-states and states-of-affairs theories of intrinsic value offer accounts of intrinsical value that imply that the bearers of intrinsic value *can* differ in how much intrinsic value they possess. However, it also has been shown that "wild and domestic organisms and species" are *not* reducible to more or less complex series of mental states or states of affairs, a finding that entails that these types of theory of intrinsic value are not available to someone who accepts inclusion of wild and domestic species as bearers of intrinsic value. But neither is an end-in-itself theory available to such a theoretician. For inasmuch as intrinsic value, understood as end-in-itself, is a categorical concept, a concept that entails that intrinsic value does not come in degrees, it *must* be false to maintain *both* that wild and domestic organisms and species differ in their intrinsic value *and* that wild and domestic organisms and species exist as ends-in-themselves.

A similar problem arises when, in addition to domestic and wild organisms and species, we consider some of Callicott's other candidates for intrinsic value—for example, "our present ecosystem, its component parts and complement of species." Suppose we limit our attention to a regional

ecosystem, one where (it is claimed) the deer population is causing environmental degradation of various forms. What are we to do? Not a few environmental philosophers believe that in such situations hunting and killing these animals is morally acceptable. And if we ask why it is acceptable, a common answer is that it is permissible (and possibly even obligatory) to engage in activities that promote the stability, diversity and harmony of the regional ecosystem.

Now there is no reason why, considered by itself, this position must be mistaken. When coupled with various beliefs regarding intrinsic value, however, the situation is importantly different. If intrinsic value is understood as end-in-itself, and if it is attributed to individuals (as Callicott, for one, recommends—see fuller quote, earlier in this essay), then all who possess it are to be treated with respect, and while a detailed exploration of this concept is beyond my reach on this occasion, it at least seems clear that we fail to show such respect if and when we treat individuals as if their value can be reduced to their usefulness relative to the achievement of some end or good, whether the end or good is an individual or collective one. And yet this is precisely what we *would* be doing if we attempted to justify hunting and killing individual animals on the ground that doing so contributed to the biological diversity, balance and stability of a regional ecosystem. Any environmental ethic that views individual deer as ends-in-themselves and at the same time justifies killing them by reference to a collective good *must* be mistaken.

In response to the problems raised to this point someone might be tempted to abandon the idea that individuals, whether wild or domestic, have intrinsic value and instead restrict intrinsic value to populations, species or other biologically and ecologically significant entities. But this maneuver can only delay the outcome, not avoid it. To begin with, some environmental philosophers believe that *species* of wild animals have *greater intrinsic value* than *species* of domestic animals, a judgment that cannot be correct if intrinsic value is understood as end-in-itself. Moreover, some environmental philosophers also are inclined to attribute greater intrinsic value to *endangered species* than to those species that are more plentiful, and this, too, is a judgment that cannot be correct if "intrinsic value" means "end-in-itself." Indeed, some environmental philosophers are prepared to sacrifice large numbers of plentiful animals in order to save endangered forms of life; they are prepared, that is, to intervene in nature, with the intention of regulating or controlling local *populations* of wildlife, in the name of a more diversified ecosystem. Again, there is no reason why

this view, considered in isolation from a theory of intrinsic value or the particular conception of environmental ethics under examination, must be mistaken. Yet this same view *must* be mistaken if intrinsic value is interpreted as end-in-itself and if, as this conception of environmental ethics requires, populations are said to have intrinsic value. As I say, this view *must* be mistaken if, as I assume, entities that have intrinsic value are always to be treated with respect and thus are never to be treated as mere means to the achievement of some desirable end (the preservation of an endangered species, for example). The conclusion we reach, then, is that end-in-itself theories of intrinsic value, just as mental-state and states-of-affairs theories, cannot do the philosophical work demanded of them by the conception of environmental ethics with which we are concerned.

6. Hierarchical Ends-in-Themselves

Here it may be said that what is needed is a *different* theory of intrinsic value, a theory that is *not* a mental-state theory, *not* a state-of-affairs theory, and *not* an end-in-itself theory. Indeed, this *is* what is needed. The problem is to say what such a theory would be like. In view of the objections raised to this point it seems that the sought-for theory cannot be strongly egalitarian but must instead (a) interpret intrinsic value as a value that comes in degrees and (b) rank intrinsically valuable entities in some hierarchy of value, from the lower (individual instances of domesticated forms of life, for example, such as this tomato and that begonia, your neighbor's cat and Old MacDonald's cow), to the next higher level (individual instances of undomesticated forms of life, let us suppose), then the next, then the next, the next, and so on. Given this hierarchical theory of intrinsic value, all members of the hierarchy have *some* intrinsic value, it's just that some members have *more* intrinsic value than others. Moreover, with this hierarchical theory as background, it could be argued that the relative possession of intrinsic value will make a difference concerning what human agents are permitted to do. If, for example, a higher member in the hierarchy of intrinsic value (say the intrinsic value of a diversified, sustainable ecosystem) is imperiled by members that have less intrinsic value (say an overpopulation of deer), then we will be permitted—indeed, to speak accurately, we will be obligated—to use various means, including lethal ones, to control or regulate the population of deer; but if there is no conflict of intrinsic values of the type described then we are not permitted and certainly not obligated to interfere with or harm these lower orders of intrinsic value.

The theory of intrinsic value just sketched interprets intrinsic values as hierarchical ends-in-themselves; that is, each member in the hierarchy exists as end-in-itself; and, so, *normally* is not to be treated as a mere means to achieving some desirable outcome; but the situation changes *when it is necessary* to treat them as a mere means in order to achieve some *higher/better* end-in-itself, such as in the example of culling a local deer population in order to preserve a diversified, balanced ecosystem.

What can be said in favor of (what I propose to call) this hierarchical ends-in-themselves theory of intrinsic value? Not much. When it comes to illuminating, accounting for or grounding our duties to nature, the theory is superfluous at best. Precisely the same limitations on human agency arguably implied by a hierarchy of ends-in-themselves can be obtained without it. It is only necessary to say that "lower" forms of life are not "means" to be used unthinkingly or carelessly but are, rather, to be treated as "mere means" *only when this is necessary* in order to protect *higher-ranking members*. On this analysis (and given the assumptions already made) it will be wrong to kill deer if their presence does not threaten a "higher good" (for example, the diversity and sustainability of a local habitat) but not wrong to do so if it does. Let this be granted for the sake of argument. There simply is no reason whatsoever for declaring that deer have "some" intrinsic value, they just happen to have "less" than a diverse, sustainable habitat. Any principle concerning our duties with respect to deer (to stay with this example) that might be justified by reference to a hierarchy of ends-in-themselves can be just as adequately accounted for—and accounted for in a nonanthropocentric fashion—*without* attributing degrees of intrinsic value to various entities in the hierarchy. *All that is needed is a hierarchy of means*, all of whose members are subordinate, in an ascending ordered way, to one supreme intrinsic good (say, the good of the biotic community).

Thus, on such a view we will have a duty not to kill deer if they are instrumentally good for a given local habitat, which in turn is instrumentally good for a more diverse, sustainable bio-region, which in turn is instrumentally good for . . . etc. On the other hand, we will have a duty to kill deer if their presence imperils the good of a given habitat which, if it is overgrazed, will imperil the diversity and sustainability of a bio-region, which . . . etc. Nowhere in this account of our duties is there any need, save at the top (so to speak), to judge that a given member in the hierarchy has intrinsic value, and yet the duties that flow from such a view are the very same duties that flow from one that attributes intrinsic value, in varying degrees, to each member. Here, surely, Ockham would (if he could) rise and offer his wise

counsel. It is not only entities that we should not multiply beyond necessity, it is also their (alleged) intrinsic value. Hierarchical theories of intrinsic value, when offered as a basis of our duties, fail the test of parsimony.

Hierarchical theories of intrinsic value also fail to illuminate, account for or ground respect for nature. The preceding examinations of mental-state and states-of-affairs theories of intrinsic value, if sound, demonstrate that there is no necessary connection between statements of the form "X is intrinsically valuable" and "X is/should be respected." Suppose we substitute "pleasure" or "awe" or "the enjoyment of seeing a beautiful sunset" or "the enjoyment of contemplating a beautiful negative after-image" for "X." For reasons advanced above, these types of intrinsic value are inappropriate candidates for objects of respect. Why suppose that "having a position in some (favored) hierarchy" is? Why suppose, that is, that the statement "The species *Canis lupus* has a place in some hierarchy of intrinsic values" in any way supports the statement "The species *Canis lupus* should be respected"? In order for the former statement to offer support for the latter, some missing premiss needs to be provided. The appropriate questions are, What is this premiss? and Where are the arguments that support it? Unless or until these questions are answered, the movement from the one statement to the other is an act of faith, not an inference of logic.

7. Other Possible Theories

Even if the arguments advanced to this point are sound, it does not follow that there are no other possible theories of intrinsic value over and above the ones I have considered. Thus, it might be thought that if only we could articulate another such theory we might yet find a way of illuminating, accounting for or grounding respect for and duties to nature in the ways required by the conception of environmental ethics we have been considering. But while there is no way to rule out the possibility of someone's fashioning a fifth, a sixth or some other theory of intrinsic value, there are the strongest reasons for believing that *any* new theory will succumb to one or other of the fatal objections brought against the four I have considered. In the case of any such theory, that is, it will fail because (1) the bearers of intrinsic value will have such value but will not be appropriate objects of respect, or (2) the bearers of intrinsic value will have such value but will not possess it commensurably and thus their having such value will fail to illuminate, account for or ground our duties, or (3) the bearers of intrinsic value will have such value and have it equally in which case there will

be no basis for the contention that wild organisms and species have greater intrinsic value than domestic varieties, or (4) the bearers of such value will be said to have intrinsic value in various degrees in which case there will be no good (parsimonious) reason to persist in saying that they have it at all. The challenge, in fact, can be put more simply: Let the supposed theory be whatever one might wish, being mindful that it cannot be either a mental-state or state-of-affairs theory for the reasons given in the above. Whatever form such a theory might take it will have to imply *either* that all intrinsically valuable entities are equal in intrinsic value *or* that they are not. If the former, then such a theory will not be able to account for the difference in intrinsic value that is supposed to hold between what is wild and what is domestic, whereas if the latter option is chosen and some hierarchy of intrinsic values is preferred, then there simply will be no parsimonious reason for supposing that "lower" members of the hierarchy have "some" intrinsic value in the first place. Thus, even if there is a fifth, sixth or some other possible theory of intrinsic value, we can (if I am right) say *a priori* that it will fall victim to one or other of the objections raised against the four theories examined in the preceding.

8. Conclusion

A common conception of environmental ethics involves appeals to nature's intrinsic values. Without such appeals, it is believed, we will be unable to illuminate, account for or ground either respect for or duties to natural entities. If I am right, this view is a mistake. *Mental-state* theories of intrinsic value will not carry the load such an environmental ethic would place on them, for although some theories of this type (for example, hedonism) will recognize the intrinsic value of the mental states of birds and bears, no such theory can illuminate, account for or ground either respect for or our duties to elms and ecosystems. *States of affairs* theories of intrinsic value also are doomed; for while they might conceivably be able to account for some of nature's intrinsic values, they will not be able to illuminate, account for or ground the intrinsic value of such environmentally significant entities as species and populations. *End-in-itself* accounts of intrinsic value fare no better; because end-in-itself theories treat intrinsic value as a categorical concept, with the consequence that no one intrinsically valuable entity can be more or less intrinsically valuable than any other, such theories must fail in grounding the differential intrinsic value of what is wild and what is domesticated. *Hierarchical ends-in-themselves* theories of intrinsic value also fail to pass muster because—among other reasons—any

duty we have with respect to nature that might be illuminated, accounted for or grounded in a hierarchy of intrinsic values can be more parsimoniously illuminated, accounted for or grounded in a hierarchy of instrumental values. Finally, while there may be other accounts of intrinsic value in addition to those I have considered, none can possibly assist in illuminating, accounting for or grounding respect for or duties to nature; for intrinsic value must be interpreted *either* in an egalitarian *or* in a nonegalitarian fashion, and the consequences in either case are inimical to the development of an environmental ethical theory.

I do not say, nor do I believe, that the *practical* implications of an environmental ethical theory of the sort under examination are always mistaken. On the contrary, on more than one occasion I have argued in support of practical conclusions validated by such an ethic.[15] My concern on this occasion has been exclusively theoretical. If I am right there is no theory of intrinsic value that, in a parsimonious fashion, can possibly meet the demands this conception of an environmental ethic imposes on it. Thus, if I am right it would be the better part of wisdom to abandon this way of thinking about and doing environmental ethical theory. And if I am wrong? Well, in this event I would hope that, by pressing the need to articulate and defend an appropriate ontology of intrinsic value, the negative import of my conclusion might help body forth a more positive result.[16]

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NOTES

1. Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 1. Directly after the passage quoted, Rolston goes on to characterize those who are "entrenched in the anthropocentric, personalistic ethics now prevailing in the Western world" as people for whom "the environment is the wrong kind of primary target for an ethic. It [the environment, nature] is a means, *not an end in itself.* Nothing there [that is, in nature] counts morally. Nature has *no intrinsic value*" (*Ibid.*, emphasis added).

2. Tom Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics*, 3, 1 (Spring 1981), 19–34. Reprinted in Tom Regan, *All That Dwell Therein: Essays on Animal Rights and Environmental Ethics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 184–205.

3. J. Baird Callicott, "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics*, 7 (1985), 257–75. See also Bryan Norton, "Conser-

vation and Preservation: A Conceptual Rehabilitation," *Environmental Ethics*, 8 (1986). Norton observes that the distinction between intrinsic and nonintrinsic values has occupied such a "central role" in environmental ethics that those who have assigned it this role are "too numerous to mention" (196, n1).

4. J. Baird Callicott, "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21 (1984), 299-309.

5. Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1986.

6. See in particular *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983).

7. "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *op. cit.*

8. Rolston's inventory of values in and associated with nature includes much more than intrinsic values. See his *Environmental Ethics*, *op. cit.*

9. Anthony Weston argues this and a number of related points with considerable force and skill. See his "Beyond Intrinsic Values: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics*, 7 (1985), 321-39. Weston himself acknowledges a debt to Monroe C. Beardsley, "Intrinsic Value," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 26 (1965), 6.

10. For relevant selections from both Bentham and Mill see Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, first ed'n. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

11. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903). See in particular Moore's discussion of Sidgwick in ch. III and his discussion of beauty in ch. VI. See also his earlier eiscussions of these topics in *The Elements of Ethics*, ed. and with an Introduction by Tom Regan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). For a more general examination of the importance of aesthetics in Moore's thought see my *Bloomsbury's Prophet: G. E. Moore and the Development of his Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), especially ch. 6.

12. Kant himself does not use the language of intrinsic value.

13. See, in particular, my *The Case for Animal Rights*, *op. cit.*

14. Again, Taylor would not use the concept of intrinsic value in this way. See my earlier remarks on his distinctions between intrinsic value, inherent value and inherent worth.

15. See, for example, "Abolishing Animal Agriculture" in my *The Thee Generation: Reflections on the Coming Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

16. I wish to thank W. R. Carter for a helpful discussion of the idea of states of affairs, J. Baird Callicott for some well directed criticisms, and especially Anthony Weston who discussed every aspect of this paper with me, with unfailing good will and good humor, and whose wise counsel saved me from making some rather silly mistakes.