
Moral Consideration and the Environment: Perception, Analysis, and Synthesis

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I do not see a delegation For the Four-footed. I see no seat for the eagles.	And we must consider To understand where we are.
We forget and we consider Ourselves superior.	And we stand somewhere between The mountain and the Ant.
But we are after all A mere part of the Creation.	Somewhere and only there As part and parcel Of the Creation.

I. Introduction

This poem, 'Consciousness,' is from an address by Chief Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Nation to the Non-Governmental Organizations of the United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland (1977).¹ It reflects a Native American perspective and much more. It may help us to understand in a fresh new way our responsibilities "as part and parcel of the Creation." My purpose in this paper, with inspiration from Oren Lyons, is to explore and clarify the idea of giving "moral consideration," by human beings to the environment.²

Concepts like "moral considerability" and "holism" which have been so central to the philosophical conversation during the last fifteen years, are not adequate to the task of describing and justifying an environmental ethic. The challenge of moving from thought to action in a world only just discovering "sustainable development" in the 21st century is a challenge that cuts to the core of our images and attitudes about ourselves. How is it possible, we might ask, for us to be "special" but "no different" in relation to the rest of nature or creation?

Ethics, forgetting, and remembering

"We forget and we consider ourselves superior," writes

Oren Lyons, as if to say that there is a backsliding tendency that moral consciousness helps us to avoid. Ethics helps us to *remember* the truth about our place in the scheme of things. Plato thought of moral knowing (indeed all knowing) in a similar way, as a kind of remembering. So did nineteenth century philosopher Josiah Royce, when he spoke of the "moral insight" as:

the realization of one's neighbor, in the full sense of the word realization; the resolution to treat him as if he were real, that is to treat him unselfishly. But this resolution expresses and belongs to the moment of insight. Passion may cloud the insight in the very next moment. It always does cloud the insight after no very long time. It is as impossible for us to avoid the illusion of selfishness in our daily lives, as to escape seeing through the illusion at the moment of insight.³

One of the practical tasks of ethical reflection and dialogue is to restore our consciousness, our awareness, our insight. Reflection and dialogue arouse us from an insensitive or forgetful condition that puts us out of touch with either the reality or the significance of others. In an environmental context, the reality and significance in question is not only that of fellow human beings, but also that of nature or the biotic community.

The emergence of conscience can be seen as a kind of Copernican Revolution in the realm of practical decision making. The decision maker – individual or institutional – no longer occupies the center of the social or even the biological universe. Other persons and groups – and other living creatures – are not simply resources to be used. They seem to invite consideration independently. Conscience emerges by nature, nurture (or both), as a practical surrender of self-centered thinking.

The ideas of "forgetting" and "illusion" in Plato, Royce, and Oren Lyons, suggest an important practical role for conscience. It "re-collects" or "re-frames" our consciousness, bringing us into closer touch – both

cognitively and emotionally – with our true place in the world and our deepest values. There appears to be a noncontingent relationship between the *giving of consideration* and the awakening of conscience and respect. This is not to say that virtue is an automatic by-product of ethical inquiry (or even ethical understanding). But it is to say that opening ourselves up for wisdom in this realm is a necessary first step toward attaining it.

II. Moral consideration and moral engagement

Some years ago, I formulated a device for segmenting the decision-making process to make it more thoughtful and “awake” for practitioners. I named the device PASCAL, after the French philosopher-mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623–62), who once remarked in reference to ethics that “the heart has reasons the reason knows not of.”

Segmenting the decision-making process

PASCAL is an acronym for Perception, Analysis, Synthesis, Choice, Action, and Learning. Each of these six segments of the decision-making process can influence the ethical integrity of the outcome, and attention to them serially can improve the thoughtfulness of the decision maker. I will refer to the first three segments (perception, analysis, and synthesis) as components of *moral consideration*, and the last three segments (choice, action, and learning) as components of *moral engagement*.

Thus, in Figure 1 below, the upper half of the cycle, consideration, leads both to and from the lower half, engagement. The moral life, I suggest, is a natural alternation between thinking and doing, considering and engaging – a rhythm that enhances one’s respect for self, others, and the environment.

Moral consideration in decision making

All decision making begins with *perception*: perception of alternatives, perception of circumstances and causes, perception of outcomes and tradeoffs. Perception initiates the process of moral consideration, but it is often itself the product of past or subconscious value decisions. In other words, perception can be and usually

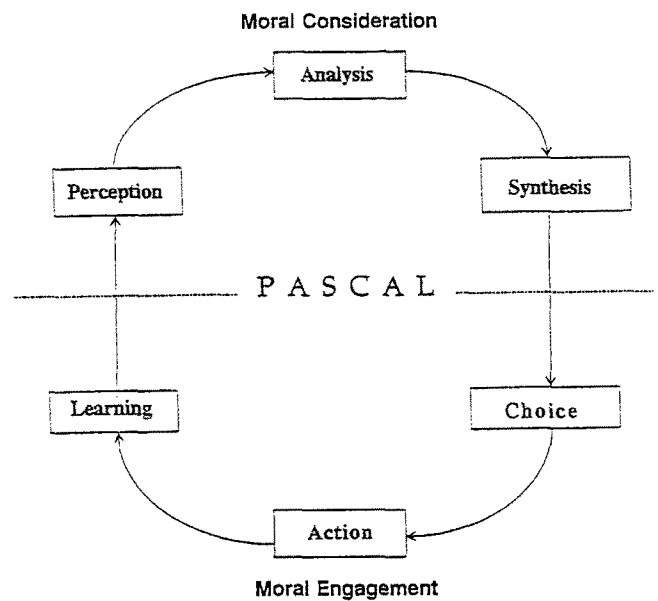


Fig. 1. The PASCAL Model

is “selective” in important ways. “Paradigms” influence our inquiries. Information must be filtered or we become paralyzed with “information overload.” But if information is filtered in ways that discount or ignore certain possibilities, circumstances, or outcomes, decisions can be influenced profoundly.

Law professor Christopher Stone once pointed out that the responsible or conscientious person observes phenomena the irresponsible person ignores. The perception of the responsible person is “stamped with moral categories,” said Stone:

The responsible person looks for certain morally significant features of his environment: other persons (and other creatures), harm, pain, benefit to the social group.⁴

Stone recalls a famous New Yorker cartoon depicting a corporate president looking at a waste pipe from his factory pouring pollution into a river. The caption read: “So that’s where it goes!” We sometimes see only what we want to see.

Perception in this sense amounts to a *preliminary scan of the ethical landscape*, highlighting phenomena (e.g., living beings, pain, harm, benefit) that will invite more careful moral consideration later in the decision-making process.

At this point, questions of “moral standing” (Who or what counts as considerable?) and the main criteria to be considered (harm, benefit, pain, survival, freedom,

etc.) form the grid or “net” of the perceptual field. What is not caught in the “net” is, morally speaking, irrelevant or “merely instrumental” as we seek to ascertain right and wrong.

Thus while perception is a preliminary awareness of facts and values in a situation that calls for decision, it is not completely neutral with respect to morality. The world is not ethically indifferent in the eye of the beholder. It is charged (by anticipation) with what Bernard Williams once referred to as the “Ought Thought.” Certain pieces of the world around the actor seem to call for attention; certain outcomes seem good or bad; certain actions right or wrong. Without perception, we would never stop to consider most options, for nothing outside ourselves would matter, morally speaking. Perception is the experiential gateway for the moral point of view.

Analysis (sometimes misleadingly⁵ called “stakeholder analysis”) represents an effort to clarify systematically the deliverances of moral perception in connection with each of the options or alternatives available to the decision maker. This can take the form of identifying, for each alternative, not only the affected parties, but the nature of the moral relationship to each (e.g., obligations rooted in beneficence, other duties, rights protected or infringed, etc.). Coming to a defensible inventory of *relevant sources of obligation* can, of course, be difficult yet critical to the decision at hand. (Think, for instance, of the importance in the abortion debate of considering the fetus as a small child with a right to life rather than a part of a woman’s body over which she deserves sovereignty.)

Ethical analysis, then, includes distinguishing between those deserving consideration as “stakeholders” and those deserving consideration for other reasons (e.g., duties of loyalty to a community or individual). It also may include a distinction between less and more inclusive communities surrounding the decision maker, e.g., from family to nation to humanity at large, then on to animals and plant life, embracing the entire ecosystem or “biotic community.” Thus analysis is more than simply perception, but it stops short of drawing a conclusion by attaching weights to the interests and rights (stakes), duties, and communities that it identifies. Analysis sorts out the significant moral features of a situation, recognizing that decisions often present not just one, but several, plausible patterns or arguments. Sometimes these are referred to as *prima facie* obligations.

For Oren Lyons, quoted earlier, analysis requires understanding “where we stand” (How partial? How communitarian?) as our consciousness moves us toward action:

And we stand somewhere between
The mountain and the Ant.
Somewhere and only there
As part and parcel
Of the Creation.

By placing ourselves in a more humble position, we continue the process of moral consideration differently than if we approached it as, say, conquerors or gods. Disagreements between humanists, animal rights proponents, and those who extend the boundary of moral consideration to include living creatures are joined in this segment of the decision-making process, but they await more definitive adjudication in the next stage.

Synthesis brings our analytical efforts back together again in what we might think of as a new perception, a “second look.” It reintegrates the field with the benefit (or curse) of a qualitative analytical discipline. Synthesis means trying to transform the analysis toward choice using some kind of “unifying” or combinatorial technique. There may be more than one defensible synthetic approach to a given analysis, as there may be more than one defensible analysis for a given perception. Sometimes synthesis converges neatly on a single choice or action, sometimes quite divergent choices and actions appear equally conclusive.

Depending on the approach that a decision maker takes to synthesis, certain ethical values or *prima facie* obligations identified in the analysis stage will tend to be emphasized over others, e.g., fairness over gratitude, or utility over truthfulness. Utilitarians, for example, seek synthesis through assigning weights to outcomes for affected parties and calculating “the greatest good of the greatest number.” Contractarians seek equality of primary goods and then maximal outcomes for the “least advantaged.” Each of these normative approaches, when taken as providing the overriding principle of synthesis, is hard to defend. But if each is seen as offering moral considerations from a legitimate and distinct analytical perspective, each helps to set the stage for a kind of “balancing” of obligations from a “moral point of view.”⁶ Synthesis can thus be monistic, pluralistic, balancing, or – more pessimistically – relativistic.

The main point I wish to make in connection with these three segments of the decision-making process

(P-A-S) is that *together* they constitute moral consideration and that moral consideration therefore goes *beyond* the notion of “moral considerability” as it has been developed in the literature of environmental ethics. (See again Figure 1.) Determining who or what counts as “morally considerable” is only *one* of the segments of the decision-making process (namely, perception). This point is often overlooked, however, leading to the mistaken belief that once the question of moral considerability is settled, one’s environmental ethic is basically complete or established. I will return to this issue shortly.

Moral engagement in decision making

To complete the PASCAL segmentation of the decision-making process, there remain the stages of choice, action, and learning (C-A-L). *Choice* is a consequence of our need to complete efforts at synthesis. Choices must be made even when the best option is not apparent, when synthesis fails to yield a clear moral priority, or when nonmoral action guides compete for practical ascendancy. Choice represents the termination or “cutting off” of consideration in the direction of engagement, ultimately because extending the consideration process can be a form of *dis*-engagement. As often observed, not to decide is sometimes a decision.

Action in the present context means implementation, the setting in motion of the causal and contractual steps that lead to the chosen alternative. And there is an ethic embodied in action as there is an ethic embodied in the consideration that precedes it. This fact can lead to curious inconsistencies between the care and attention given to people’s feelings, for example, *prior* to choice and coercive tactics employed in the process of implementing the choice. Action in some situations involves policy making and institutionalizing certain choices. In other situations, it may be more personal, more a matter of behavioral steps or habit formation.

Finally, engagement includes *learning*, observing and living with the true implications and results of our actions. We learn when we monitor the unfolding of our decision making with a degree of humility and willingness to modify our habits. Learning not only completes the implementation process, it also readjusts our *perceptual* modifies or reinforces the “moral stamp” on our perceptual categories. It can help us to “see better” next time, and therefore brings us full

circle or perhaps “full spiral” in the PASCAL framework.

The six-part segmentation sketched here is merely an attempt to clarify the ideas of “thoughtfulness” and “remembering” mentioned earlier by allowing us to explore the ethical dimensions of each of the segments. A decision-making process that is guided by pure self interest will be different at every turn from one that is guided by environmental responsibility. PASCAL offers us an inventory of the turns.

III. Perception as moral considerability

Moral consideration, we have seen, is a process that goes beyond just determining moral considerability. According *standing* or *considerability* gives form to moral perception, which is itself part of the process of giving moral consideration – a process that also includes analysis and synthesis.

We can now formulate the questions that present themselves as moral consideration unfolds. And we can ask what a mature environmental consciousness would call for at each state. As we do so, we shall discover that there are three importantly distinct ideas that call for clarification, the first two of which can be equivocal between stages: “holism,” “impartiality,” and “pluralism.”

The clearer we are on the difference that an environmental outlook makes on the decision making stages of moral *consideration*, the more likely we are to achieve through moral *engagement* the just and effective policy arrangements we seek.

Living things both great and small

Fifteen years ago, I wrote an article which appeared in the *Journal of Philosophy* entitled ‘On being morally considerable.’ The thrust of the article was that the conventional criterion of moral “standing” or moral considerability was indefensibly narrow in modern moral philosophy. Usually, the criterion was either rationality, humanity, or sentience. I argued that “being alive” was a more defensible criterion of considerability and I implied that there was a noncontingent relationship between our approach to moral considerability and our behavior toward the natural environment. I believed then, and still do, that our

outlook on moral considerability influences our environmental ethic in practice.

In essence, the more tightly drawn the radius of moral considerability, the more expansive the region of instrumentality – the more nature becomes simply a resource or means to be used by those with moral standing. As Mark Sagoff recently put it, “The environment is what nature becomes when we see it as the object of planning, technology, and management.”⁷

Around the same time (1978–79), I wrote another essay entitled ‘From egoism to environmentalism,’ which appeared in *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (Notre Dame Press, 1979). Here I probed further into the anatomy of an environmental ethic, challenging not only the *extension* of moral considerability to living creatures other than humans, but challenging also what might be called the *unit* of considerability. I argued that not only individual, relatively “atomic” living entities deserved moral consideration – but also wholes or systems of living entities had standing. Biotic communities or ecosystems – because in important ways they exhibited the essential traits of self-sustaining living organisms – needed to be accommodated by an adequate environmental consciousness or ethic. The concept of “standing,” I argued, could vary not only across living individuals but also across living communities of individuals.⁸

It is worth observing here that for me the shift to larger or smaller “scales” or units of considerability (e.g., from living individuals to living systems) was principally guided by a need for consistency regarding the criterion of considerability (life).⁹ It was an inference from the original line of argument (for the life criterion) to include wholes in addition to individuals. The fact that this shift opened up policy concerns about such issues as species endangerment, pollution, degradation of ecosystems (that went beyond debates over vegetarianism and furs) was a consequence, not a source, of the argument.¹⁰

In the terminology of the PASCAL model, the focus of my earlier articles was on the category of perception, expanding the “gateway” of moral consideration while leaving to one side the complexities of analysis and the challenges of synthesis. These latter issues were allocated to the realm of “moral significance” and tabled. Now we must take them off the table.

From sakes to stakes: equivocating on holism and impartiality

“Holism” in the context of perception is the view that wholes, not just individuals, can meaningfully satisfy the criteria of moral considerability.¹¹ “Impartiality,” in this context, is simply the view that all living things (things with “sakes” of their own) are morally considerable, not subsets that are rational or even sentient. Since moral considerability prescind from questions of moral significance, this impartiality does not automatically translate into equality between groups or species, e.g., humans, animals, and living things generally. In other words, equal moral considerability is consistent with differential significance among our obligations.

A consequence of this point is that terms like “anthropocentrism,” “zoocentrism,” and “biocentrism” can be confusing. If they are taken to refer to progressively more embracing boundaries on moral *considerability*, this leaves open questions about the relative strength or *significance* of our obligations at each boundary. Thus “biocentrism” in the context of moral perception would be consistent with a kind of “anthropocentrism” in connection with moral analysis or synthesis if, for example, human beings were regarded as no more *considerable* but much more *significant* in comparison with animals or plants. In recent debates over the use of baboons for liver transplants to humans, this aspect of moral consideration may eventually influence action and public policy.

But there is another, more subtle, confusion possible in moving beyond the perceptual stage of the consideration process. It lies in a semantic shift from “sakes” to “stakes.” An account of moral considerability is a view about who or what can enter into the arena of moral consideration – who or what shows up on our preliminary “screen” or scan of the perceptual landscape. Who, asks Royce, is my neighbor? Who, asks Oren Lyons, gets a seat or a delegation? If the answer to the question is, as many (including myself) have argued, that “having an interest or a ‘sake’ – sentient or not – is the key,” then it is tempting to go a step further. Tempting, but misleading.

From “having a sake” to “having a stake” seems like a natural enough transition. After all, if moral considerability is about having interests, and having interests is having a “stake” in the outcomes of alternative decisions, then doesn’t our account of moral considerability

carry us directly into an outcome-based view of right and wrong – based on a kind of “stakeholder analysis” – and perhaps even further into a quasi-utilitarian or teleological approach to ethical synthesis?¹²

There seems to be a slippery slope from (1) an interest-based view of moral perception to (2) a stakeholder-based view of moral analysis. From (2) it is a short step to (3) an aggregation of nonmoral interest satisfactions aimed at either maximization (utilitarianism) or fair distribution (contractarianism). No sooner do we embrace an account of *perception* than we find ourselves tracking toward a certain kind of *analysis* and eventually a certain kind of *synthesis*.

The trap, of course, lies in this: that determining whether an individual or a whole merits standing in our ethical perception is not the same thing as determining *how* such standing is to be accorded or interpreted. There is a fallacy in moving from being considerable to having a “sake” and then to stakeholder thinking. To suggest that the moral considerability of *X* requires not only that *X* have a “sake” but also that obligations to *X* must be viewed through the lens of a teleological principle, is most implausible. From a “sake-holder” in the perceptual arena, we can be led fallaciously to a “stakeholder” in the arena of *prima facie* obligation – the analytic arena.

While the idea that ethical analysis amounts to no more than teleological consideration of *X* may be *consistent* with *X*’s being morally considerable, there may be other ways for *X*’s considerability to be processed, since there are other avenues of ethical analysis (such as communitarian or other kinds of deontological analysis, discussed below).¹³ And since communitarianism may be interpreted using a term like “holism,” we must be careful to keep it separate from holism as a *perceptual* category, the view that wholes can be morally considerable. Moral obligations may spring from other sources than simply tending to the needs, wants, desires, or interests of individuals *or* wholes.

IV. Analysis as *prima facie* obligation

In the case of analysis, two questions define the avenues by which *prima facie* moral obligations reach our awareness:

(1) Does environmental ethics require a step beyond stakeholder analysis?

(2) Does humanity have any special significance in the moral scheme of things, or is humanity simply one among many species?

As we shall see, stakeholder interests or rights may be seriously inadequate as the sole framework for identifying environmental obligations. We may need to supplement this framework with a more *holistic* communitarian outlook. And *impartial* attitudes toward the relative significance of living species may need to be supplemented by principles that are more partial, i.e., that give special recognition of humanistic concerns for human decision makers.

“Communitarianism” or “analytical holism,” will refer to the view that certain wholes can be sources of moral obligation quite independently of their contribution to nonmoral value or interest satisfaction. Holism at the analytical level means wholes are obligation-making (*prima facie*), not just consideration-meriting (considerable). And I shall refer to “analytical impartiality” as the view that the community or totality of all living things is what is obligation-making, not a rational or sentient subset.

Communitarianism: beyond stakeholder analysis

Recognizing the importance of wholes (like social groups or ecosystems) is a valuable step toward environmental awareness. Aldo Leopold’s guiding imperative that an action is right when it “tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic *community*” and wrong otherwise is salutary. But as a statement about the moral considerability of a biotic whole whose “interest” merits our attention, it may be very different from a statement about the role of a biotic community in grounding our moral obligations.

A whole or a system that qualifies for moral consideration (perception) because it is self-preserving may not be best regarded as simply another stakeholder alongside all the others (analysis), competing for an impartial decision maker’s favor. This is particularly true if the decision maker *belongs* to the whole in question, as to a community. Holism at the perceptual level, while it is a conclusion from our criterion of moral considerability, leaves logically *open* a different kind of holism at the analytical level. Communitarianism treats wholes as sources of *prima facie* obligation *not* in virtue of their being recipients of

beneficence or fairness, but in deontological terms. Let us look at this idea more closely.

The proposition that communities and ecosystems enter into moral consideration either by being treated as sums of individual values or as individual units of nonmoral value in their own right, i.e., by being “individualized,” is not a proposition that is self-evident in philosophy. Quite the contrary, many would argue that Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Bradley, reversed the primacy of the individual over the community. Instead of seeing communities as mere aggregations of “more real” individuals, Bradley argued that individuals are in the end “less real” than the groups that give them life. As he put it in 1876:

To the assertion, then, that selves are ‘individual’ in the sense of exclusive of other selves, we oppose the (equally justified) assertion that this is a mere fancy. We say that, out of theory, no such individual men exist; and we will try to show from fact that . . . what we call an individual man is what he is because of and by virtue of community, and that communities are thus not mere names but something real, and can be regarded (if we mean to keep to facts) only as the one in the many.¹⁴

Interpreting Bradley for a contemporary audience, Professor Richard Norman (University of Kent, UK) points out that there are “two crucial ways in which Bradley’s conception of self-realization differs from the utilitarian conception of happiness.” In Norman’s words they are:

- (a) Traditional utilitarianism employs an additive, cumulative conception of happiness. Whether one’s life is happy is determined by putting together individual units of happiness, adding up experiences of pleasure and subtracting pains . . .
- (b) The utilitarian approach is to extend the concept of happiness, from the individual to the general happiness. The utilitarian starts with the idea that it is rational for the agent to pursue his/her own happiness, and then adds on, *externally*, the requirement that the agent must also aim at everyone else’s happiness. For Bradley, commitments to others are *internal* to self-realization, because they are internal to the self.¹⁵

Norman’s view seems to be that utilitarian thinking (and Rawlsian thinking on this matter is not so different) involves a kind of atomism *both* regarding the building blocks of happiness *within* the life of an individual *and* regarding the building blocks of the “common” good *between* the lives of individuals. The latter is essentially the sum of individual inputs. The centrality of atomism in the analysis and synthesis of moral “data” contrasts

sharply with Bradley’s holistic conviction that the *community* is a source of obligation, and that individuals are what we might call “dutyholders” more than “stakeholders.”

Toward the end of his book, Norman defends Bradley’s view (or a version of it) and suggests that some duties or obligations do not enter through what I would call “the stakeholder gate” at all:

Quite simply, it is not the case that the only things which *matter* to human beings are states to be brought about, satisfactions to be achieved. In general terms, I want to suggest, the other fundamental category of human concerns is that of the commitments and loyalties which are involved in social relations, and it is these that must form the second principal component of a naturalistic ethics. The traditional distinction between ‘teleological’ and ‘deontological’ conceptions of ethics reflects the distinction between these two fundamental kinds of considerations, ‘needs’ and ‘social relations’, which can function as reasons for human actions. Both are essential components of an adequate theory.¹⁶

Communitarianism, we can now say with more precision, is the view that wholes enter into moral consideration directly and deontologically as sources of *prima facie* obligations, not simply indirectly as nonmoral values or even as sums of nonmoral values. It is my membership in the whole (the first personal “we” – an internal relationship) that gives rise to my duties of loyalty and fidelity in family, civic, national, and human communities. These moral bonds are not adequately parsed as external relationships to the interests of a sum or even a quasi-living collective.

When Kant asked us to test our maxims by “willing them to be universal laws of nature,” he was, in effect, placing a “kingdom of ends” ahead of individual fulfillment in the moral scheme of things.¹⁷ This was in many ways a communitarian insight, though it was left to Hegel to develop this theme fully. And in the communitarian realm, as with more atomistic moral outlooks, we can imagine more and less embracing “wholes.” We might even imagine such wholes widening beyond the boundaries of humans and animals to include life forms of every kind.

I want to suggest that the conceptual distance between Kant’s “kingdom” and Aldo Leopold’s “biotic community” may not be so great. Communitarians might ask that we “environmentalize” our maxims, not just “universalize” them, attending to the *ecology* of the kingdom, not just its noumenal personnel. Sustainability, as we learned from Rio in 1992, can be a useful

concept, even if difficult to apply. Stakeholder thinking, in contrast, interprets moral obligations strictly in terms of the nonmoral values (individual or group) brought about by an action or policy.

One implication of communitarianism for environmental ethics is that it challenges the concept of a demand theory of value and a cumulative theory of obligation, ideas dear to the hearts of many economists. William James, a contemporary of Bradley, voiced this sentiment eloquently if not irrefutably when he wrote:

Take any demand, however slight, which any creature, however weak, may make. Ought it not, for its own sole sake, to be satisfied? If not, prove why not. The only possible kind of proof you could adduce would be the exhibition of another creature who should make a demand that ran the other way.¹⁸

This Jamesian mindset, which may lie behind the conflation of moral considerability with stakeholder analysis, appears to ignore or discount the possibility that not another individual *creature*, but one's human or biotic *community*, might call for the moderation, transformation, or even negation of demand: a set of oughts "from all around," as it were, rather than "out front."¹⁹ In the words of sociologist Philip Selznick:

Ecological awareness encourages respect for the integrity, autonomy, and fragility of ecosystems. The rule is: handle with care. Behind the rule lies a profound appreciation for the continuity of man and nature and for the importance of tailoring human aspirations to the requirements of those natural systems whose well-being is intimately connected with our own. The presumption of mankind, and the hard revenge of nature, are nowhere more clearly revealed than in the rationalist effort to manipulate the environment without restraint.²⁰

Communitarianism, then, is anchored in a firm belief that having an environmental conscience means more than liberating wider and wider circles of creatures or larger and larger collective entities for purposes of interest or demand satisfaction. This brand of ethical analysis insists that there is more to moral consideration than simply *extending* sympathy or caring to their limits, thereby *accumulating* individual or even *group* beneficiaries. Moral relationships to one's family, human and ecological, present us with obligations in a different way than "objective" causal connections to strangers or external groups.

The communitarian impulse recognizes that while individuals are truly valuable, communities are not merely conveniences for personal flourishing. Individuals could be obliged to moderate or even sacrifice

for a common good, could owe gratitude, could experience the community as a direct source of obligations. And such obligations are not, on this view, externally motivated or self-destructive. They are seen as coming from within, as Norman observes in his commentary on Bradley:

It has to be said that the sacrificing of one's own interests need not be a sacrificing of oneself to something external. We have learned from Bradley that relations with others are not purely external to the self. My commitment to my friends or my children, to a person whom I love or a social movement in which I believe, may be a part of my own deepest being, so that when I devote myself to them, my overriding experience is not that of sacrificing myself but of fulfilling myself.²¹

We have so far described holism at the perceptual level (the moral considerability of wholes) and at the analytical level (communitarianism). The former departs from simple consistency about the application of a criterion of considerability (e.g., life) from individuals to wholes. Holism at the analytical level springs from a conviction about the insufficiency of beneficence (even joined to justice) as an adequate rendering of the moral insight. Communitarianism is a duty-based, more than a rights-based or desire-based, approach to obligation.

I hasten to add that taking communitarianism seriously does not entail *rejecting* beneficence and justice (and the atomistic, nonmoral analysis that accompanies them). I would argue, *contra* Bradley and perhaps *contra* Selznick, that just as there can be a "tyranny of individualism" that is blind to the profundity of our connectedness, so there can be a "tyranny of the social group" or whole that is blind to the depth of our autonomy. ("My country, right or wrong, my country.") Whatever we are in our communities, we are not means only.²²

Thus the holistic issue in the *analytical* stage of moral consideration consists mainly in recognizing the importance of a communitarian perspective ("dutyholder analysis") beyond a teleological perspective ("stakeholder analysis"). Both approaches to analysis might be (and I believe should be) accorded *prima facie* legitimacy.

Humanism and environmental fascism

There is another analytic variable, however, besides communitarianism, in tension with stakeholder con-

sequentialism. The boundaries of those communities and those classes of affected parties may or may not be taken to constitute morally relevant “pauses” in the process of consideration. They may or may not be seen as defining independent sources of *prima facie* obligation capable of conflict and calling for “weights.”

Attention to *prima facie* obligations, while it stops short of synthesis, is inevitably attention to normative substance, whether the focus is conventional “humanistic” ethics or environmental ethics. And talk of “holism” in this context can lead to puzzles about the place of the human community in the context of Leopold’s concern for the “biotic community.” Nowhere is this more evident than in the discussion of J. Baird Callicott’s “ecocentric” *summum bonum* described in the following passage:

An environmental ethic which takes as its *summum bonum* the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community is not conferring moral standing on something *else* besides plants, animals, soils, and waters. Rather, the former, the good of the community as a whole, serves as a standard for the assessment of the relative value and relative ordering of its constitutive parts and therefore provides a means of adjudicating the often mutually contradictory demands of the parts considered separately for *equal* consideration.²³

Callicott has here gone beyond *perception* (considerability) and perhaps even beyond ethical *analysis*. We are moving from moral considerability to moral significance and normative substance. The good of the biotic whole is put forward as the umpire for equal but conflicting interests and demands. Some have charged that this view puts at risk fundamental humanistic obligations in the name of a kind of ecocentric impartiality. Bryan Norton summarizes (and joins) several critics:

Callicott holds that Leopold’s disdain for (a) human arrogance and (b) the atomistic and individualistic assumptions of mainstream economic thought must be accepted or rejected together, entailing (c) holistic nonanthropocentrism – the recognition that ecosystems, not the individuals composing them, are the true sources of independent value. Hence, Callicott suggested, citing Plato’s *Republic* as a model, that for the land ethicist as for the statesman, “it is the well-being of the community as a whole, not that of any person or special class at which his legislation aims.” This is a view that Callicott describes as attributing “inherent value” to the land community. It is this invocation of Plato and similar passages . . . that prompted the labeling of Callicott and Leopold as “environmental fascists.”²⁴

Two concerns present themselves in connection with this debate between Callicott and his critics, including Norton:

- (1) Respecting human beings while according only contingent or instrumental value to nonhumans fails to measure up to our environmental convictions about the value of life generally; but
- (2) Ecocentrism with only a contingent commitment to human beings (as individuals and as a community) also appears to be unsatisfactory (“fascism”).

Proposition (1) claims the environmental insufficiency of a viewpoint *partial* to humans. Proposition (2) claims a corresponding insufficiency regarding an *impartial* viewpoint. Let us observe Callicott’s response and consider our own:

[Some] claim that the holistic aspect of Leopold’s seminal land ethic . . . is tantamount to “environmental fascism.” If, as Leopold wrote and his exponents affirm, “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community and wrong when it tends otherwise,” then not only would it be right to kill deer and fell trees for the good of the biotic community, it would also be right to undertake draconian measures to reduce human overpopulation – the underlying cause, according to conventional environmental wisdom, of all environmental ills. Ecocentrism thus appears liable to a *reductio ad absurdum* of its own.²⁵

Callicott then explains how to avoid the *reductio*:

An ecocentric environmental ethic, although providing for the possibility of moral consideration of wholes, does not disenfranchise individuals. Ecocentrism is holistic *as well as* (not instead of) individualistic, although in the case of the biotic community and its nonhuman members holistic concerns may eclipse individual ones. Nor does an ecocentric environmental ethic replace or cancel previous socially-generated human-oriented duties – to family and family members, to neighbors and neighborhood, to all human beings and humanity.²⁶

With respect to Proposition (1) above, Callicott’s position seems to be that holistic (though perhaps not individualistic) concern for nonhuman beings is to be maintained. With respect to Proposition (2), his position is that a commitment to human beings (as individuals and as a community) is *not* simply contingent in relation to the nonhuman members of the biotic community. In other words, there is no fascism and there is no contradiction. We can have our humanistic cake and eat it too:

Human social evolution consists of a series of additions rather than replacements. The moral sphere, growing in circumference with each stage of social development, correspondingly, does not expand like a balloon – leaving no trace of its previous boundaries. It adds, rather, new rings, new “accretions,” as Leopold called each emergent social-ethical community. The discovery of the biotic community simply adds a new outer orbit of membership and attendant obligation. *Our more intimate social bonds and their attendant obligations remain intact.* Thus we may weigh and balance our more *recently discovered* duties to the biotic community and its members with our more venerable and insistent social obligations in ways that are *entirely familiar*, reasonable, and humane.²⁷ (emphasis added)

Callicott seems to be reassuring skeptics that his “ecocentrism” is less radical than they thought: it allows for an (impartial) individualism-cum-holism and it keeps our (partial) humanistic social obligations *intact*. The cost may be having to reconcile several *prima facie* principles (“rings”?) in a moral synthesis. But how can we weigh and balance “recently discovered” duties to the wider biotic community with our humanistic obligations in ways that are “entirely familiar”?²⁸ It sounds like ethical *déjà vu!*

What has happened, I believe, is that in the process of introducing “ecocentrism” as a *summum bonum*, a second, countervailing idea presented itself, namely, partiality toward fellow human beings. But, to allow humanism to remain “intact” and “entirely familiar,” – to have, so to speak, a ring of its own – the claim of supremacy (*summum bonum*) for impartial ecocentric thinking must be suspended.

In terms of the PASCAL model, ecocentrism cannot be a synthetic principle, consolidating *prima facie* obligations into actual ones, though it can take a strong place among the existing set of *prima facie* obligations. *How strong* remains to be seen, but the stronger it is, the less “familiar” will be its impact.

Oren Lyons said that “we must consider to understand where we are.” We must “remember” that adding previously-excluded groups to our operating ethic has seldom if ever been “entirely familiar, reasonable, and humane.” One has only to be reminded of blacks in Selma and South Africa, Native Americans in South Dakota, and women in Saudi Arabia. The very young and the very old may also be “rings” on the Tree of Life.

As the decision maker passes from perception into analysis, he or she faces the challenge of identifying *prima facie* obligations in a given situation along two main axes: (i) stakeholder-consequence approaches vs. communitarian-duty approaches to obligation, and (ii)

more and less partial (vs. impartial) obligations to individuals or communities of morally considerable beings. This is an oversimplification, of course, but it shows how the analytical process goes beyond perception, stopping short of actually assigning final weights or lexical order to *prima facie* obligations. See Figure 2 below.

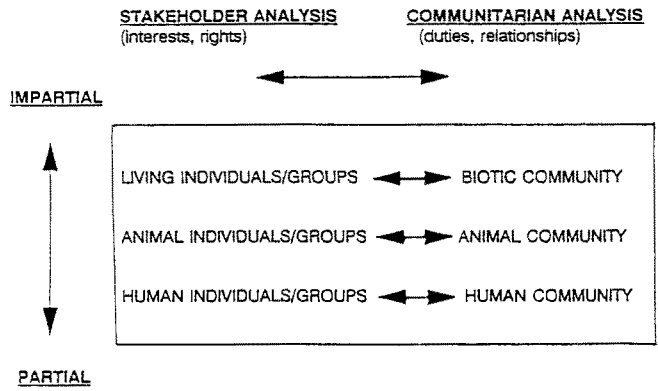


Fig. 2. Ethical analysis: Two axes of *prima facie* obligation.

V. Synthesis as consolidation: pluralism and stewardship

The movement from moral consideration to moral engagement, i.e., from thought to action, eventually requires consolidation and judgment. Either by default or by design, our decision making includes determinations not only of moral considerability but also of moral substance. Inevitably perception and analysis must give way to synthesis and choice. (Recall Figure 1.)

But, as with moral analysis, the idea of moral synthesis must be interpreted carefully. It is tempting, as we have seen, to interpret analysis in a solely teleological and impartial fashion, ignoring the communitarian and partial perspectives (Figure 2). It then seems natural to interpret synthesis as simply an assignment of relative “weights” to the individuals (or groups of individuals) that are deemed morally considerable. Assigning such weights, summing, and maximizing expectable utility (or even the well-being of the least advantaged) would presumably go a long way, if not all the way, from analysis to synthesis. Historically, it is a reasonable bet that utilitarian and contractarian approaches to normative ethics have been attractive because of the ease with which they move from perception to analysis to

synthesis. Intuitionism and pluralistic theories have been thought to be “messy” in comparison.

Insofar as *analysis* involves no more than impartially identifying nonmoral interests and satisfying them, it would seem that *synthesis* is no more than weighing and combining those satisfactions. But what if maximizing the weighted satisfactions of those affected (either average utility or that of the least advantaged) were part of the environmental *problem* rather than part of the *solution*? What if this approach to decision making led to unsustainable demands on nature – environmental “deficit spending” in a manner of speaking? Philip Selznick, quoted earlier, suggests such a view:

Perhaps the greatest significance of this [communitarian] perspective as a practical matter is that to *maximize* any discrete value, goal, or utility is *prima facie* offensive to the community of reason. There is a modern tendency to associate rationality with maximizing gains of one sort or another, whether they be profits, payloads, Nielsen ratings, or missiles. But anchored rationality has the effect of multiplying commitments. The pursuit of any given end is restrained by taking account of consequences for *other ends* whose fate we care about but that might be ignored or slighted. The language of maximization is or should be an early warning that rationality, detached from reason, is out of control.²⁹

Selznick is giving voice here to a concern that we might all share: that a rationalist teleological path from analysis to synthesis might – far from leading to environmental responsibility – take us “out of control” to an ethic that does not confront the holistic imperative of moderation. If ethical *analysis* includes a communitarian interpretation, then ethical *synthesis* cannot be simply a matter of doing our practical best to satisfy aggregate demand and may involve moderating demand by reference to considerations like “biotic sustainability” or collective responsibility to a biotic community that has parented us and sustained us.

By the same token, however, allowing for some degree of stakeholder thinking in our analysis may mean foregoing a pure communitarian account of moral synthesis, e.g., an account according to which the flourishing of the community as an organic whole ultimately supercedes any individual stakeholder claims.³⁰

As we pass to the synthesis phase of moral consideration, then, a puzzle emerges about how to consolidate our ethical analysis. Since both communitarianism and stakeholder thinking have *prima facie* merit as forms of analysis, how are we to consolidate sometimes competing judgments at the point of synthesis? What is it reasonable to endorse as an account of synthesis

on this axis? On the one hand, it is tempting to simply choose a monistic “umpire” principle in order to simplify the consideration process. While this may mean truncating or discounting parts of our analysis, it at least has the virtue of simplifying our synthesis.

On the other hand, embracing a relativistic position, one might deny that there is any objective way to balance or weigh *prima facie* obligations. Here the idea is that analysis moves more or less directly into choice, and that choice is in the eye (or head or heart) of the decision maker. Moral engagement, for the relativist, is as much a political process as an implementation process, since relative dominance of ethical opinion becomes a surrogate for philosophical argument.

Monism and relativism both seek efficient paths through synthesis. Might there be a less efficient middle ground called “pluralism” – a point of view for consolidating ethical analysis toward a normative conclusion that avoids both monistic reduction and relativistic fragmentation? W. D. Ross appealed to intuition in order to “weigh” and consolidate *prima facie* obligations. While critics have been skeptical about the objectivity of such an appeal, can we really do any better than a kind of environmental intuitionism? Perhaps not, but we may be able to strengthen such a position in a way that removes obscurity and affords a kind of structural or ecological “balance” among the *prima facie* duties that it recognizes. Such an environmental intuitionism would at least have the virtue of practicing what it preaches. Ecology within the mind is perhaps a condition for respecting ecology outside it.

Nagel’s view from nowhere

I am reminded, at this point, of the paradoxical “View from Nowhere” that Thomas Nagel has characterized as a central structure of moral thought. In Nagel’s way of describing our predicament:

We are faced with a choice. For the purposes of ethics, should we identify with the detached, impersonal will that chooses total outcomes, and act on reasons that are determined accordingly? Or is this a denial of what we are really doing and an avoidance of the full range of reasons that apply to creatures like us? This is a true philosophical dilemma; it arises out of our nature, which includes different points of view on the world. When we ask ourselves how to live, the complexity of what we are makes a unified answer difficult. I believe the human duality of perspectives is too deep for us reasonably to hope to overcome it. A fully agent-neutral morality is not a plausible human goal.³¹

Nagel's view is really a refusal to collapse the tension within the moral point of view into either a partial, deontological principle *or* an impartial, teleological one. He accords legitimacy to both in an uneasy pluralism that sees every action as, in a sense, *two* actions: one expressing my role and my relations (where my actions are not merely instrumental in bringing about states of affairs), and the other aimed at making something happen (where my actions are importantly instrumental).³²

Nagel's discussion seems not to distinguish, however, the two axes that are best kept separate in environmental ethics: the holism/stakeholder axis and the partial/impartial axis. Instead he focuses on the communitarian/partial *versus* the stakeholder/impartial diagonal in Figure 2. There is *some* warrant for this since it is *my* community to which *I* belong and to which *I* owe certain duties or obligations.

But if we reflect on the fact that the communitarian/stakeholder polarity applies with boundaries ranging from oneself (Royce), to one's group, to one's species to the entire biotic community, it seems clear that there are actually two independent variables behind the analytical scenes, not one. Nagel's observation about what we can do in the face of the tension, however, may (and I think does) still apply – only twice over:

The task of accepting the polarity without allowing either of its terms to swallow the other should be a creative one. It is the aim of eventual unification that I think is misplaced, both in our thoughts about how to live and in our conception of what there is.³³

Environmentally, we need to ask whether Nagel's position offers a plausible rendering of the logic of our situation, and a reasonable reluctance to simply adopt "holism" and "impartiality" as expedients for moral closure.³⁴

The image of the steward: synthesizing two polar axes

One weakness in conventional intuitionism is the lack of structure in its list of *prima facie* duties. The list seems *ad hoc* without an account of its genesis and the relationships among its members. In this paper, however, we have made some progress on this front by identifying the genesis of moral consideration in perception (see Figure 1) and its structure in the two polar axes of analysis (see Figure 2).

Another weakness in Ross's approach lies in the lack of guidance afforded by the rather abstract notion of "intuition." If there were a less abstract notion that could serve as a heuristic device or interpretative metaphor, it might make a pluralistic approach more appealing. Just such an image is that of a *steward*:

One intrusted with the management of the household or estate of another; one employed to manage the domestic affairs, superintend the servants, collect the rents or income, keep the accounts; one who acts as a supervisor or administrator, as of finances and property, for another or others. (Webster's Unabridged)

The connotations of *service* to individuals and groups as well as some broader authority (individual or whole) to which the steward belongs and is *loyal* both are evident. The steward is interested in stakeholders, but is also clearly a dutyholder in relation to the larger "household or estate." The steward can be seen as exhibiting all at once a recognition of Bradley's "station and its duties," the utilitarian "greatest good" principle, and contractarian fairness principles in policies affecting stakeholders. The ethics of stewardship anchors moral obligation not only in consequences that the agent brings about ("manager of domestic affairs"), but also in relationships that the agent inherits ("intrusted," "employed," "for another or others").

But the steward image is fruitful in a *second* way as well. It not only helps us to span the stakeholder/communitarian axis of the analytical grid, it also sheds light on the impartial/partial axis. For the steward is expected to be impartial in the exercise of influence and authority over the "household," but the steward is also inevitably bound to be partial to himself/herself, lest the stewardship role be self-destructive and eventually destructive of the entire "estate."³⁵ In other words, the steward must in some sense be both "special" among the servants and other members of the household, and yet "no different" – must not treat the other as a mere means to his/her ends. If anything, the steward is a means for the household members, not the other way around.

In 1991, the U.S. Catholic Bishops published a joint letter entitled "Renewing the Earth." It re-examines biblical and traditional ethical values in relation to economic development and environmental ethics. It is striking that, at a key point, the stewardship metaphor is offered for balance:

Stewardship implies that we must both care for creation according to standards that are not of our own making and at the same time

be resourceful in finding ways to make the earth flourish. It is a difficult balance, requiring both a sense of limits and a spirit of experimentation. Even as we rejoice in earth's goodness and in the beauty of nature, stewardship places upon us responsibility for the well-being of all God's creatures.³⁶

Even apart from its religious outlook, this perspective emphasizes a humanity that is "intrusted" or invested with environmental responsibility.

As we think about the analytical axes of duty-holder/stakeholder and impartial/partial in the context of environmental responsibility, we can perhaps appreciate the value of maintaining rather than "resolving" or "fixing" the *prima facie* duties that define them. The key to environmental intuition may lie in understanding the four-way pulls on stewardship: to be conscious of sustainable community as well as stakeholder consequences in responding to policy challenges, and to be partial to the community of stewards, not as a matter of prejudice but as a matter of ultimately serving the household (ecosystem) effectively. See Figure 3 below. The image of the steward is helpful to the degree that it embodies the standpoint of the human environmental decision maker.

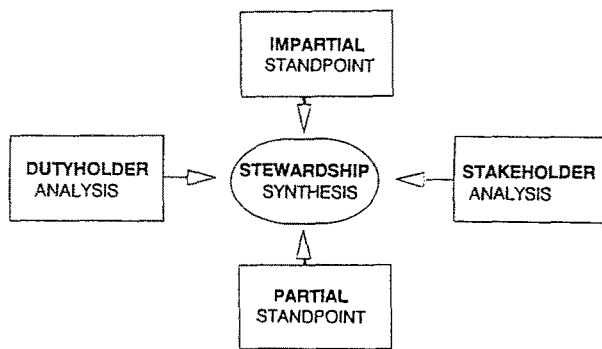


Fig. 3. Stewardship: Synthesizing two axes.

An ecology of thought before action

The principal challenge for an environmental *philosopher*, then, may not be so different from that described by the bishops and other spiritual leaders: to seek to recognize the place of humanity in the larger scheme of nature and to appreciate how *centrality* is distinct from *dominance*. The morality of humanism and the morality of stewardship toward nature may not be incompatible. In fact, there may be a sense in which the morality of stewardship toward nature *requires* the

morality of humanism. For the steward cannot play the steward's role unless there is an ethic of (humanistic) self-preservation and even self-realization. If humanity is more like a tenant gardener than a landlord, then it is *not domination but cultivation* that guides and nurtures our ethical intuition.³⁷ Thus what are often presented as contradictory views, "anthropocentrism" and "ecocentrism," may actually have interpretations that are philosophically coherent. Such coherence does not mean, of course, that difficult practical challenges disappear as we move toward moral engagement.

Nonhuman nature is not simply instrumentally valuable to humans. The truth may be closer to the reverse: the stewards are instrumentally valuable to non-humans, at least if they are good stewards. Humanity is ideally the guardian and protector of its own life *as joined with* life generally. An ethic of stewardship looks to the biotic community, listens to it, and serves (hopefully) as *its* protection from parasites and destruction.³⁸ As human beings, we appear uniquely to have the capacity to discern the difference between life-threatening life (parasitism) and life-enhancing life (stewardship). Our worst "sin" may be to become parasites ourselves, exploiting life with no compensation.

In connection with Nagel's conviction about the polarity at the core of conscience or ethical reflection, we can say at least this much. The logic of moral synthesis does seem to be polarized between "anthropocentrism" and "ecocentrism" – between a partial and an impartial standpoint on environmental obligations. And the two seem incompatible because they tend to prioritize conflict situations in opposite ways, one giving the benefit to human beings, the other to biotic considerations generally.

Nevertheless, there is a certain reality about our being unable to detach entirely from partiality in the direction of impartiality. The metaphor of stewardship helps us to see that humanity can be both an end and a means for nature, and that nature can be both an end and a means for humanity. Such closure at the synthetic stage is perhaps not greater than the appeal to intuition by W. D. Ross, but it does advance the vision of humanity with a central role in a wider community of nature.³⁹

It may be that such a community is one in which "life for life's sake" is not *enough*. Protecting, cultivating, and enhancing life may be both humanity's vocation and its fulfillment at once. To quote Selznick one last time, in a passage whose rhythms are reminiscent of Aldo Leopold:

When human needs and aspirations are at issue, only those ideas and programs make sense that are securely founded in the continuities of biological and social life. True reason is not counterposed to impulse or passion; rather, it builds upon them, is nourished by them, and seeks to lead them into constructive and life-enhancing paths.⁴⁰

VI. Summary and conclusion: toward moral engagement

I have explored the concept of moral considerability to show that it is only a part of the larger enterprise of giving moral consideration. After clarifying the PASCAL model of decision making, we saw how the first three segments – perception, analysis, and synthesis – define moral consideration and invite us to clarify ideas like “holism,” “impartiality,” and “pluralism.” I argued that holism and impartiality at the perceptual level should not be confused with holism (communitarianism) and impartiality (ecocentrism) at the analytical level.

I also argued that there were four *prima facie* obligation poles at the analytical level that were best accepted at the synthetic level in a kind of environmental pluralism. Unlike more abstract intuitionistic approaches, however, this approach is supported by an image or metaphor that adds coherence: humanity’s stewardship toward nature.

Much remains, of course. We need to develop the moral engagement part of the model, to understand the active pathway from consideration to choice, action, and learning. (See Figure 1 again.) For consideration without engagement is impotent, while engagement without consideration is blind. We need a broader practical vision and a broader practical agenda.

I began this essay by sharing a poem by Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Nation, and his poetic meditation on moral consideration was also inspirational along the way. Let us now come full circle and conclude with another quotation from this wise man, a quotation that is disarming in its use of classical categories for a thoroughly contemporary message:

Natural law prevails everywhere. It supersedes Man’s law. If you violate it, you get hit. . . . One of the Natural laws is that you’ve got to keep things pure. Especially the water. Keeping the water pure is one of the first laws of life. If you destroy the water, you destroy life. That’s what I mean about common sense. Anybody can see that. . . . Another of the Natural laws is that all life is equal. That’s our philosophy. You have to respect life – all life,

not just your own. The key word is ‘respect.’ Unless you respect the earth, you destroy it. Unless you respect all life as much as your own life, you become a destroyer, a murderer. Man sometimes thinks he’s been elevated to be the controller, the ruler. But he’s not. He’s only part of the whole. Man’s job is not to exploit but to oversee, to be a steward.⁴¹

Notes

¹ Oren Lyons, ‘Consciousness’, in Wall, Steven and Arden, Harvey, *Wisdomkeepers: 1990*, Beyond Words Publishing, Inc., Hillboro, OR.

² Special thanks to Michael Degnan, Dept. of Philosophy, University of St. Thomas, and Kent Baldner, Dept. of Philosophy, Western Michigan University, for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

³ Royce, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 155. An interesting question that will suggest itself later in this paper is: If it is in some sense “natural” for us not only to remember but also to *forget*, then can we say that only one of these two postures has any legitimacy?

⁴ Stone, Christopher, 1975, *Where the Law Ends: The Social Control of Corporate Behavior*, (Harper & Row), p. 114.

⁵ See Goodpaster, ‘Can a Corporation Have an Environmental Conscience?’, 1990, in *The Corporation, Ethics, and the Environment*, Hoffman, et al. (eds.), NY: Quorum Books, pp. 25–38. I say “misleadingly” because I have come to believe that the use of a concept like “stakeholder” prejudices the analytical framework in certain directions as argued in Part IV. Specifically, it suggests what philosophers call a teleological principle of obligation (nonmoral goods or “stakes” as the exclusive input). And it also constrains us to consider the environment, if we consider it at all, as a “stakeholder” – a way of thinking and speaking that seems awkward at best.

⁶ See Goodpaster, 1983, ‘Some Avenues for Ethical Analysis in General Management’, Harvard Business School Case Services, 9-983-007. Reprinted in *Policies and Persons: A Casebook in Business Ethics*, by Matthews, Goodpaster, and Nash, 1991, McGraw-Hill, Second Edition.

⁷ ‘Nature Versus the Environment,’ *Philosophy and Public Policy* (Summer 1991).

⁸ See Salthe, Stanley and Barbara, 1989, ‘Ecosystem Moral Considerability: A Reply to Cahen,’ *Environmental Ethics* 11, 355–61.

⁹ Life appears to be organized like a “fractal,” a geometrical figure made up of self-similar versions of itself. Systems of living things can themselves exhibit the characteristics of living things. See Goodpaster, 1985, ‘Toward an Integrated Approach to Business Ethics’, *Thought* (June), pp. 161–80.

¹⁰ J. Baird Callicott, 1992, in his entry on environmental ethics in the *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Becker (ed.), attributes “biocentrism” to me, urging instead “ecocentrism” because biocentrism “does not directly address the most important contemporary environmental problems.” My point is that this expansion may be appropriate for independent reasons having to do with one’s criterion of considerability. I should add further that this does not entail that the so-called “Gaia hypothesis” is true. What it entails is that *if* that hypothesis

is true, namely, if the biosphere behaves as a living whole, then it deserves moral consideration.

¹¹ Behind the scenes in the distinction between “wholes” and “individuals” is a question about metaphysical molecules and atoms. I do not take a position in this paper on metaphysical foundations, ultimate building blocks, etc. It seems to me that the distinction between individuals and wholes in this context is compatible with different metaphysical views. The main point here is that, e.g., human beings and animals, whether they be “wholes” or not (metaphysically), are, relative to social groups and species, individuals (ethically). Am I committed *a priori* to the truth of the Gaia hypothesis? No.

¹² By teleological, I simply mean a view of moral responsibility that is anchored in nonmoral value consequences of action, whether toward individuals or wholes that are capable of being benefitted or harmed. Such a view reduces all other moral obligations in the end to beneficence (and perhaps also justice). The trap is to move from moral value to *prima facie* moral obligation to actual moral obligation, without taking account of deontology.

¹³ Goodpaster, 1983, ‘Some Avenues for Ethical Analysis’, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ F. H. Bradley, ‘My Station and its Duties’, in A. I. Melden, 1967, *Ethical Theories*, Prentice-Hall, p. 454.

¹⁵ Richard Norman, 1983, *The Moral Philosophers*, Oxford University Press, pp. 169–70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁷ I realize that Kant’s views admit of an individualist reading as well, though his followers, especially Hegel, saw this as something of a slip.

¹⁸ William James, *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, SUNY Edition 1984, p. 302.

¹⁹ See Bryan Norton, 1991, ‘Thoreau’s Insect Analogies: Or, Why Environmentalists Hate Mainstream Economists’, *Environmental Ethics* (Fall 1991), p. 250:

Environmentalists worry that economists’ decision to accept all demands as equally valid will fail to focus attention on reducing demands. For example, I interpret the soft energy path policy (supported by nearly all environmentalists) as an argument [to] invest in reducing demand for fossil fuels, rather than investing in research and development to match an apparently ever-increasing demand . . . [G]enerally, environmentalists believe that strategies to reduce demand are preferable to strategies of supply development.

As I read him, Norton seeks to environmentalize ethics by maintaining anthropocentrism but encouraging a less “demanding” theory of nonmoral value (“weak” anthropocentrism). I agree with the need to curb demand, but I find the leverage and rationale for doing so in communitarian obligations as much as in theories of nonmoral value.

²⁰ Selznick, 1987, ‘The Idea of Communitarian Morality’, *California Law Review*, p. 458.

²¹ Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

²² Whether this polarity of communitarian and individualistic analysis is (and should be) more characteristic of our analysis of humanity-regarding obligations than obligations to the rest of nature is a question I shall set aside for now.

²³ Callicott, 1980, ‘Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair’,

Environmental Ethics (Winter), 311–338. Reprinted in Scherer, pp. 63–64).

²⁴ Norton, 1991, ‘Review of Callicott: In Defense of the Land Ethic’, *Environmental Ethics* (Summer), p. 182.

²⁵ J. Baird Callicott, 1992, ‘Environmental Ethics’, entry in Becker (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Garland, p. 313.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

²⁸ The *reductio* was supposed to be that impartial ecocentrism might in principle dictate draconian measures against large numbers of human beings. It is difficult to see how recently discovered duties to the biotic community do not interfere with some fairly venerable social obligations *ex hypothesi*, unless new “accretions” are understood to be overridden by older ones in a kind of lexical ordering. But then it is hard to imagine much besides business as usual in the realm of environmental policy and action.

²⁹ The Idea of Communitarian Morality’, *California Law Review*, 1987, p. 459. Selznick also points out (p. 453) that:

If the self as a biological and social formation is decisively affected by circumstances not chosen, among which are memberships in family and community, then the boundaries between individual and collective responsibility are indistinct. They cannot be nicely limited by the criterion of free choice. People who are nourished by a community, and “accept” what they never dreamed of choosing, have no standing to deny at least some responsibility for what the community is and what it has done.

³⁰ See above, the “tyranny of the social group.”

³¹ Nagel, 1986, *The View From Nowhere*, Oxford University Press, p. 185.

³² On the impartial or teleological view, Nagel writes, agents “turn themselves into instruments.” One senses here a warrant for phrases like “environmental fascism.” Nagel, 1979, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 204–205:

The consequentialist judgment that one should do something is essentially the judgment that it would be best if one did it – that it ought to *happen*. The right thing to do is to turn oneself as far as possible into an instrument for the realization of what is best *sub specie aeternitatis* . . . Agent-centered views, on the other hand, determine what is right, wrong, and permissible partly at least on the basis of the individual’s life, his role in the world, and his relation with others. Agent-centered morality gives primacy to the question of what to do, a question asked by the individual agent, and does not assume that the only way to answer it is to say what it would be best if he did, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

³³ Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. 213.

³⁴ On the one hand, he recognizes the difference between deontological (dutyholder) and teleological (stakeholder) roots of obligation, and at the same time he distinguishes partial and impartial perspectives as a deep truth about human action. Is there a single principle at the center of such a view, or are we left with several

equally justified, incommensurable approaches to synthesis? Must pluralism with respect to *prima facie* obligations force us into a choice between relativism and some monistic principle at the level of synthesis or actual obligation? No. The claim that there is truth or justification in ethics does not imply that there is a tidy formulation of it.

³⁵ Think of the ritual advice of the airline flight attendant: "In the event of a drop in cabin pressure, oxygen masks will appear. Put on your own masks *first, then* assist your children." At least sometimes, partiality may be a pathway to moral responsibility.

³⁶ U.S. Catholic Bishops' Letter, 'Renewing the Earth', *Origins* (CNS Documentary Service, December 12, 1991). The document cites several biblical warrants for its outlook. One of the most eloquent is from *Genesis*: "See, I am establishing my covenant with you [Noah] and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark." (*Gen.* 9:9).

³⁷ See Lloyd H. Steffen, 1992, 'In Defense of Dominion', *Environmental Ethics* (Spring 1992), pp. 63–80.

³⁸ All the while observing the life-affirming values and obligations directed to its own members. To pursue a parable: the shepherd cares for the sheep and will sacrifice much for them; but the shepherd must also take care of the shepherd, since the sheep cannot.

³⁹ There may be a difference between the notion of a *community* and the notion of a *whole*. In fact, there may be a difference between the notion of a community and the notion of a *living whole*. The key lies in the fact that some living things, while considerable, are not significant or are positively dangerous (e.g., certain viruses). Some living things appear to be life-destroying in important ways – they are parasitical on life, they consume it, and then they themselves die. In this sense, they are – as individuals or even as wholes – antithetical to the notion of a biotic *community*.

⁴⁰ 'The Idea of Communitarian Morality', 1987, *California Law Review*, p. 458.

⁴¹ Chief Oren Lyons, 1990, *op. cit.*

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