Are Humans Superior to Animals and Plants?

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Louis G. Lombardi’s arguments in support of the claim that humans have greater inherent worth than other living things provide a clear account of how it is possible to conceive of the relation between humans and nonhumans in this way. Upon examining his arguments, however, it seems that he does not succeed in establishing any reason to believe that humans actually do have greater inherent worth than animals and plants.

It is a longstanding tradition in both Western and Eastern philosophy that human beings belong to a higher order of living things than animals and plants. Thus, according to Judaism and Christianity humans are made in God’s image and are given dominion over the lower-order creatures (Genesis, chap. 1). Aristotle held that “after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and . . . the other animals exist for the sake of man . . . ” (Politics, chap. 8). In Oriental philosophy the idea of a gradation of beings is connected with the belief in the transmigration of souls from one level of existence to another. The Indian religion of Jaina, for example, conceives of the universe as divided into four tiers of reality, on the highest of which dwell gods, on the next humans, hell beings (those suffering just punishment) on the third, and plants and animals on the lowest.1

Common to all these views is the belief that a human being’s existence is more valuable than the existence of an animal or plant. We live on a higher plane, are capable of nobler achievements, and possess a dignity and worth that are absent from other forms of life. Something more important, something of greater value, is lost to the world when a human being dies than is lost to the world when a lion, a snake, or a tree dies.

This idea is so deeply ingrained in our culture that it is difficult to think clearly and critically about it. To many people it seems perfectly obvious that the well-being of humans has greater value and accordingly should be given


greater weight in our moral deliberation, than the well-being of animals and plants. Yet, when we try to discover sound, objective reasons that would justify this belief, we are often confronted with obscure metaphysics, uncritical appeals to intuition, an outright begging of the question, or hopeless conceptual confusion.

In my article “The Ethics of Respect for Nature”\(^\text{2}\) I briefly examined and criticized three classical arguments for human superiority: the Judeo-Christian view that humans have been placed by God in a higher position on the Great Chain of Being; the Greek view that, as rational beings, humans are superior to animals and plants in their essential nature; and the Cartesian view that humans have greater worth because they have souls, while other creatures are mere bodies. My conclusion was that none of these arguments can stand up to critical scrutiny. I now wish to look at a contemporary argument which has been offered by Louis G. Lombardi.\(^\text{3}\) Although Lombardi’s reasoning is not flawed by the usual weaknesses that beset these efforts,\(^\text{4}\) I do not think that he succeeds in justifying the claim that humans do have greater inherent worth than other living things.

A first step in approaching this problem is to make clear the value concepts we are going to be using. In particular, we must distinguish the idea of inherent worth from the concepts of the immediately good and the intrinsically valued, as well as from the concept of merit or excellence. All of these are to be set over against instrumental value and commercial value. I briefly summarize these distinctions here.

1. **Instrumental Value.** This is the value placed on something in virtue of its being an effective means to some valued end.

2. **Commercial value.** The economic worth of something is measured by its price on the market or by the amount one can sell it for.

3. **Merit or excellence.** This is the good-making properties which something has, by virtue of which it fulfills a grading or ranking standard.

4. **The immediately good.** This is any experience or activity of a conscious being which it finds to be enjoyable, satisfying, pleasant, or worthwhile in itself. (This is also sometimes called *intrinsic value*.)

5. **The intrinsically valued.** An entity is intrinsically valued in this sense only in relation to its being valued in a certain way by some human valuer.

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The entity may be a person, animal, or plant, a physical object, a place, or even a social practice. Any such entity is intrinsically valued insofar as some person cherishes it, holds it dear or precious, loves, admires, or appreciates it for what it is in itself, and so places intrinsic value on its existence. This value is independent of whatever instrumental or commercial value it might have. When something is intrinsically valued by someone, it is deemed by that person to be worthy of being preserved and protected because it is the particular thing it is. Thus, the people of a society may place intrinsic value on a ceremonial occasion (the coronation of a king), on historically significant objects (the original Declaration of Independence) and places (the battlefield at Gettysburg), on ruins of ancient cultures (Stonehenge), on natural wonders (the Grand Canyon), and of course on works of art. Intrinsic value may also be placed on living things, which then are intrinsically valuable to (have intrinsic value for) the human valuers. A pet dog or cat, an endangered population of rare plants, or a whole wilderness area can be considered worth preserving just for what they are. Finally, anyone we love and care about has this kind of value for us. From a moral point of view, correlative with intrinsically valuing something is the recognition of a negative duty not to destroy, harm, damage, vandalize, or misuse the thing and a positive duty to protect it from being destroyed, harmed, damaged, vandalized, or misused by others.5

(6) Inherent worth. This is the value something has simply in virtue of the fact that it has a good of its own. To say that an entity has inherent worth is to say that its good (welfare, well-being) is deserving of the concern and consideration of all moral agents and that the realization of its good is something to be promoted or protected as an end in itself and for the sake of the being whose good it is. Since it is only with reference to living things (humans, animals, or plants) that it makes sense to speak of promoting or protecting their well-being and of doing this for their sake, the class of entities having inherent worth is extensionally equivalent to the class of living things.

When a living thing is regarded as possessing inherent worth, it is seen to be the appropriate object of the moral attitude of respect. This kind of respect, “recognition respect,” should not be confused with the attitudes of love, admiration, and appreciation directed toward entities that are intrinsically valued.

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5 It is this kind of value (actually, one subtype of it, expressive of national ideals) that Mark Sagoff is talking about in his essay, “On Preserving the Natural Environment,” *Yale Law Journal* 84 (1974): 205-67. Tom Regan has decisively shown that the value of a wilderness, of rare animals, and of other aspects of nature becomes, under Sagoff’s analysis, entirely relative to culture. If a particular society did not hold ideals that could be symbolized in nature and wildlife (for example, if it happened to value plastic trees more than real ones), then for Sagoff there would be no reason for that society to preserve nature or protect wildlife. Such a view is the extreme opposite to the view that wild living things have what I call inherent worth (and which Regan calls inherent value in the article in which he discusses Sagoff’s position). See Tom Regan, “The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic,” *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 28-30.
in sense (5) above. A still different attitude of respect, “appraisal respect,” is directed toward anything insofar as it is judged to have merit or excellence in sense (3) above.  

It might be noted that machines like chess-playing computers and self-guided missiles can be said to have functions to perform and even goals which they aim at, but this does not imply that the concepts of welfare (faring well) and well-being apply to them in the way they apply to living organisms. Their functions and goals are given to them (by being built into them) by their human makers. They, therefore, do not have a good of their own—that is, a good that belongs to them independently of any other being’s purposes or activities. But all sorts of entities, artificial no less than natural ones, can be intrinsically valued by humans and hence have value in sense (5) above.

If we now ask ourselves which of these types of value can be a matter of degree, so that it makes sense to say that one thing has greater value than another, the answer is that this is true of all of them. Making judgments of comparative degrees of value is unproblematic for types (1), (2), and (3). Concerning type (4), it is also quite clear that one experience or activity can be said to have greater immediate goodness than another, when the first is more enjoyable, more satisfying, or considered more worthwhile than the second. The only problem regarding (4) arises in connection with interpersonal utility comparisons, but this much discussed problem, which I think is amenable to various solutions, need not detain us here.

With reference to type (5), the intrinsically valued, different degrees of value can be attributed to entities according to how highly or how strongly they are in fact valued by people. Since it is people (valuers) who, as it were, create the intrinsic valuableness of something by valuing it in a certain way, such value will vary with the degrees to which things are so valued. A person might cherish one thing more than another and so want to preserve and protect it more than the other, though both are appreciated for what they are. So here again no conceptual difficulty is involved with the idea of degrees of value.

We come now to type (6): the inherent worth of a living thing. Can there be degrees of inherent worth? On this point I agree with Lombardi that it is indeed conceptually possible for there to be such degrees. There is no logical absurdity in holding that one animal or plant has greater inherent worth than another, or that humans have the greatest inherent worth of all living things on Earth. What would it mean to speak this way?

The first point to notice is that, unlike the intrinsic valuableness of things, the inherent worth of living beings is not derived from the fact of their actually

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6 Stephen Darwall distinguishes “appraisal respect” from “recognition respect” (the terms are his) in: Stephen L. Darwall, “Two Kinds of Respect,” Ethics 88 (1977): 36-49. What I have analyzed as the attitude of “respect for nature” can be thought of as a special kind of recognition respect.
being valued by persons (valuers). Thus, if there are degrees of inherent worth, such degrees cannot be due to varying levels of intensity of attitudes, or to different preferential orderings, or to the degrees of strength in the way people value living things. We must keep in mind here that if an entity has inherent worth, its worth does not depend on anyone regarding it in that manner. To regard it as having inherent worth is to consider its good to be worthy of being promoted or protected as an end in itself and for the sake of the being whose good it is, independently of whether anyone does value it (appreciate it, hold it dear, cherish it, etc.). What is being asserted when one asserts that it has such worth is that its good deserves to be realized as something valuable in itself, and that moral agents owe it their concern and consideration as its due. This assertion can be true even if no one thinks its good deserves to be realized, and even if no moral agents do give it their concern and consideration.

The parallel here with our inherent worth as persons is exact. If we believe that we possess inherent worth simply in virtue of being persons, we think this worth belongs to us as persons, quite independently of being so regarded by others. We consider our basic interests as deserving moral respect equally with others, whether or not we are so respected. We think we should be treated in a manner that is rightfully our due as a being of inherent worth. The fact that others do not accord us that treatment gives us no reason to question our belief. The statement, “As a person I have inherent worth,” is a normative one, not a descriptive one. It means, “Because I am a person I ought to be (am entitled to be) treated in certain ways and not in others.” This ought statement is not contradicted by any is statement about how we are in fact treated by others.

So it is with the statement that animals and plants have inherent worth. The truth of such a statement (if it is true) is logically independent of the truth of the statement “Animals and plants are regarded (by someone) as having inherent worth.” When we regard X as having inherent worth we do place intrinsic value on the realization of its good, but our placing intrinsic value on the realization of its good is not what gives it its inherent worth. It has that worth independently (just as we have our worth as persons independently of how others might or might not value us).

As far as the conceivability of degrees of inherent worth is concerned, it is logically possible for different entities, all of which have some inherent worth, to vary in the amount of worth they have. Although this variation would not be a function of the subjective valuings of valuers, talking about “varying degrees of inherent worth” is not a meaningless use of language. To say X has greater inherent worth than Y is to say that X’s good is more deserving of the concern and consideration of moral agents than is Y’s good and is therefore to be given greater weight as a relevant reason for action. It is to say that a world in which X’s good is realized and Y’s good is not realized is (everything else being the same) better than a world in which Y’s good is realized and X’s is not. It would not mean, however, that if X is a human, it is right
for $X$ to use $Y$ as nothing more than a means to $X$’s ends, since this would be treating $Y$ as if it had only instrumental value and lacked all inherent worth.

Our question, then, may be formulated thus. Granted that there is nothing logically absurd or inconceivable in the idea that humans have greater inherent worth than animals and plants, is it actually the case that they do? Let us turn to Lombardi’s attempt to establish an affirmative answer to this question.

The central argument of Lombardi’s paper runs as follows. (1) Animals, plants, and humans are different types of living things. (2) These types are differentiated by the range of their capacities. (3) The greater the range of an entity’s capacities, the higher the degree of its inherent worth. On the basis of these propositions and another proposition—(4) humans have a greater range of capacities than animals and plants—it is concluded that humans are superior in inherent worth to animals and plants.

There is no doubt that the range of human capacities extends beyond that of animals and plants, if “range” refers to various kinds of capacities, such as intellectual, moral, aesthetic, religious, and political. These may all be contrasted with biological capacities (reproduction, growth, adaptation to environment, and other functions common to all living things) and with mere physical capacities (motion and rest, and various uses of energy). Humans have these biological and physical capacities and, in addition, the psychological, moral, cognitive, and cultural capacities that are special to them. Thus, they have a wider range of capacities than other living things.

The crucial point at issue, however, is this: why does having a wider range of capacities correlate with, or serve as the ground for, greater inherent worth? Unless this connection is made clear, no conclusion concerning human superiority follows from the mere fact that humans have additional capacities to those found in other species. When we look at what Lombardi says about this, we are left with many unanswered questions.

(1) The general principle by which degrees of inherent worth are to be determined (Lombardi’s principle $p$) is stated thus: “A type of being that (1) has the capacities of other beings and (2) has additional capacities that differ in kind from the capacities of other beings, ought to have more inherent worth” (pp. 263-64). In support of the reasonableness of this principle, Lombardi asserts that “. . . it is simply an extension of the strategy used for determining grounds for ascribing any inherent worth” (p. 264). Just as any inherent worth is ascribed to a living thing because it has certain capacities which are not found in nonliving objects, so differences in “levels” of inherent worth can be posited for different kinds of living things, where differences in kind are based on different ranges of capacities.

This reasoning overlooks what it is about all living things that serves as the ground of their inherent worth (if they do have inherent worth). It is not their capacities taken by themselves; rather, it is the fact that those capacities are organized in a certain way. They are interrelated functionally so that the organism as a whole can be said to have a good of its own which it is seeking.
to realize. The concepts of benefit and harm, of what is good for it or bad for it, of faring well or poorly, and other connected ideas, must be applicable to such an entity, for it is by virtue of its having a good of its own that we can meaningfully say that its good is deserving of moral concern and consideration, and that the realization of its good is to be promoted and protected for the sake of the being whose good it is. Insofar as all living things are ascribed some inherent worth, it is the simple truth that each one has a good of its own which counts as the sufficient ground for such worth. This is what their having inherent worth means (as distinct from their being intrinsically valuable to—one because they happen to be intrinsically valued by—one person or group of persons).

There is no analogous line of thought which would entitle us to use differences in capacities among living things as grounds for ascribing different degrees of inherent worth to them. To say that some have greater worth than others is to say that the good of some is more deserving of realization than that of others. This is an intelligible thing to say, and it may be so, but the question to be answered is: if this is so, why is it so? The mere fact that organisms can be categorized into various types according to their different ranges of capacities does not answer that question. Assuming that the inherent worth of an entity is not something that is conditional upon its being valued by humans, but depends solely on the fact that it has a good it is seeking to realize, then unless differing ranges of capacities can be shown to make a difference in the realization of the good of various types of beings, the mere fact that some types of beings have a wider range of capacities than others can have nothing to do with their inherent worth. Those with a relatively narrow range of capacities (plants and single-celled protozoa, for example) can, after all, realize their good at an optimum level by the actualization of those capacities under favorable environmental conditions. They don’t need any additional capacities to have the kind of existence which, for those of their species, constitutes a good life. Why should their capacities be played down, or assigned a lower grade, simply because they are not as wide as the capacities of others (who need such capacities for the realization of their good)?

Lombardi cites Peter Singer’s statement that “. . . concern for the well-being of a child growing up in America would require that we teach him to read; concern for the well-being of a pig may require no more than that we leave

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7 The assumption being made here is not that \( X \) having inherent worth is entailed by \( X \) having a good of its own. There is no logical contradiction involved in affirming that \( X \) has a good of its own and denying that \( X \) has inherent worth. Rather, it is a relation between a “supervenient” property and a basic property. One regards \( X \) as having inherent worth (the supervenient property) in virtue of \( X \)’s having a good of its own (the basic, value-conferring property) insofar as one takes the attitude of respect toward \( X \) and considers that attitude to be rationally justified. The truth of the value judgment that \( X \) has inherent worth follows from the rational grounding of that attitude in what I call “the biocentric outlook on nature,” as explained in my paper, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature.”
him alone with other pigs in a place where there is adequate food and room to run freely.\textsuperscript{8} This is just what would be required if we have a moral duty to give consideration to the well-being of children and pigs alike. The variation in action is due to the fact that what furthers a child’s good does not further a pig’s, and vice versa. It has nothing to do with a difference in the worth of a child and a pig.

(2) A second sort of consideration is raised by Lombardi in connection with what he takes to be the crucial relevant difference in kind between humans and other animals. This is the set of capacities “associated with moral agency (e.g., rationality, complex communicative skills, understanding of moral values)” (pp. 265-66). He grants that these capacities are not more valuable (in the instrumental sense) than those of animals, since animals can realize their good without them, but he claims that these capacities do provide the ground for a higher level of inherent worth because humans are moral agents in virtue of such capacities.

Why do the capacities of moral agency endow greater inherent worth on an entity which has them, when compared to an entity lacking them? I do not find any answer to this question in Lombardi’s essay. He does discuss my argument (in “The Ethics of Respect for Nature,” p. 213) that a being with the capacities of moral agency cannot be said to be superior in moral merit to one lacking them. My point was a purely negative one: that degrees of higher and lower moral merit (virtue and vice) can only be attributed to entities that are moral agents, and that such differences in merit are not to be confused with different degrees of inherent worth between beings that are moral agents and those that are not. Lombardi points out that this argument cannot be used to refute the claim that moral agents are superior beings. I agree, but this gives us no positive reason why we should consider them superior to other living things as far as their inherent worth is concerned.

(3) A third point considered by Lombardi has to do with the idea of rights. He holds that humans have moral rights, but animals and plants do not. This is a view with which I concur.\textsuperscript{9} Lombardi is puzzled, however, about how I can reject the idea of animals’ and plants’ rights and still hold that humans are not superior to nonhumans. He reasons as follows. To have moral rights is to have valid moral claims to certain things, such as life and liberty. These claims cannot justifiably be overridden by the interests of others or by the furthering of others’ well-being. This status of having supreme priority is the


role that rights perform in a moral system. Thus, one would never be justified in violating a human being’s rights simply in order to help an animal or plant realize its good. But, continues Lombardi, if we accept this inference, aren’t we granting that those who have moral rights are inherently superior to those who lack such rights, since we are giving greater weight to the interests of the former than to the interests of the latter?

The flaw in this argument is that it moves illegitimately from the role of rights in a system of human ethics (governed by principles defining duties and obligations of humans toward other humans), where the claims of moral rights override all other considerations regarding how humans are to be treated, to making rights play a similar role with reference to the moral relations between humans and nonhumans. That I have valid claims which other moral agents have a duty to acknowledge and respect does not entail anything about how I should treat, or be treated by, animals and plants. Since they are not moral agents, it is nonsense to talk about their respecting or not respecting my rights. Human rights simply have no role to play in relation to the actions of animals and plants. If a poisonous plant were to be the cause of a person’s death or if a wild animal were to attack and kill a person, neither the plant nor the animal treats the person unjustly by violating a human right.

Human rights are valid moral claims which the rights holders have against other humans. Now suppose one is confronted with a choice between furthering the good of an animal or plant and respecting the rights of a human. Does the rights claim of the human necessarily take priority over consideration for the well-being of the animal or plant? This question, I submit, cannot be answered merely by referring to the fact that the human has rights while the animal or plant does not, for even if animals and plants do not have rights, they may yet possess a degree or amount of inherent worth equal to that of humans. To say that they possess a worth equal to ours means that we owe duties to them that are prima facie as stringent as those we owe to our fellow humans, including those correlative with human rights. It means that, other things being equal, their good is to be given as much weight in moral deliberation as our own good. This by itself tells us nothing about what ought to be done, all things considered, when there is an unavoidable conflict between furthering their good and respecting the rights of humans. (It is not clear to me, for example, that our liberty right to use paper products always overrides the well-being of the trees that would have to be cut down for the paper.) When we have validly binding prima facie duties of equal stringency that are in conflict, some principle must be appealed to in order to find a fair way to resolve the conflict. Unless it can be shown that the fair way is always to fulfill the rights of humans at the expense of the good of animals and plants, the principle is not determined in advance by any consideration of which entities have rights and which do not. Now a principle of always favoring human rights over the good of nonhumans would be entailed by the proposition that humans
have greater inherent worth than nonhumans, but reference to the concept of
rights has not enabled Lombardi to establish the truth of this proposition.

(4) A final point made by Lombardi is that in fact the overwhelming major-
ity of people do consider animals and plants to have some degree of inherent
worth, though not at the same level as the worth of humans. A radical biotic
egalitarian simply cannot account for this generally held view, which must
have some basis for its almost universal acceptability.

It is probably true that in most contemporary societies people do not take
a purely exploitative attitude toward nature and its living inhabitants. They
do not consider wild animals and plants to have only instrumental value, to
be used in any way we wish to serve our own ends. On the other hand, neither
are most people biotic egalitarians. As Lombardi correctly points out, “The
actual attitudes of persons do not fall into either camp” (p. 258). Nevertheless,
there must be some explanation of why practically everyone thinks of human
existence as having a higher value than the kind of life animals and plants are
capable of. What account can be given of this if one holds, as I do, that such
a belief reflects a profoundly distorted and completely mistaken picture of the
relations between humans and other living things?

Part of the explanation, it seems to me, lies in our ever-increasing power over
the natural world. We have always been able to crush an ant simply by stepping
on it, but we can now clear-cut a vast forest in a short time with modern
machinery. We can wipe out whole populations of animals or plants by spray-
ing an area with chemicals. With the development of genetic engineering we
achieve the power to create new species and new individuals with an identical
genetic structure, thus taking upon ourselves the reproductive processes that
lie at the center of life. With this power to create and destroy life at will goes
a psychological distancing from that over which we exercise it. Other living
things come to be seen as mere objects to be manipulated as we wish. The more
we are able to control and dominate the living world, the less respect we have
for it. Thus, we acquire a disposition to look at creatures who are within our
absolute power to be beneath us, in the sense of being inferior in worth.

But this is only part of the explanation for our belief in human superiority,
and perhaps the less significant part. A more important explanation lies in a
pervading and unquestioned value judgment concerning our human ways of
life in contrast with the modes of existence carried on by plants and animals.
When we compare the richness and variety of our own experiences with the
very limited and narrow existence of those other creatures, we tend to think
how dull and impoverished life would be if we were destined to exist as they
do. Their lack of freedom of choice, for example, is seen as a terrible condition
to be forever caught in. We have a sense of gratitude at the good fortune that
we were not born one of them, a sense that comes sharply into focus when,
through some abnormality of birth or by some accident or disease a human
being is reduced to leading an animal’s simple kind of life, or even diminished
below that level to what is often called a “vegetative” existence. We hear of such cases and consider them a calamity, a great misfortune, a tragedy. In comparison with the severely restricted kind of existence that is the lot of plants and animals, our own human modes of life are naturally appreciated for being so much richer, fuller, more interesting and desirable in every way. So we imagine the daily life of a plant or animal to be inexpressibly dull, empty, valueless.

What is to be noted in all this is the fact that we experience these reactions from a strictly human standpoint, a standpoint in which our own well-being is tacitly assumed as the standard for living a good and worthwhile life. A good life for us would have to include a far greater range of experiences, involving the exercise of a far greater range of capacities, than is possible for an animal or plant. If we were to remove ourselves in thought and imagination from this strictly human perspective, however, and view an animal’s or plant’s life from its standpoint, concentrating our attention upon what would be a good life for that kind of creature to live, we would recognize that their species-specific capacities for healthy biological functioning are of genuine value in their struggle to further their well-being. From their point of view the capacities that enable them successfully to cope with their environment are precisely those suitable for living a good life, just as our ability to enjoy wider, deeper kinds of interactions with the world are suitable for our living a worthwhile human way of life.

Within this objective frame of reference, where we view the lives of animals and plants from their perspective and not our own, we see that there is no reason for making a lower assessment of the worth of their good compared to the worth of our human good. We are then open to the possibility that, as fellow members of the Earth’s total community of life, they may possess an inherent worth equal to the worth we ascribe to ourselves as persons. It is true that, if they were beings of lesser worth, it would be justifiable for us to have less respect for them than we have for persons, but unless it can be shown that, objectively considered, they do have lesser worth, we must take the same moral attitude toward them as we do toward ourselves. The fact that most people actually have a higher respect for persons than they do for animals and plants only reveals that they have not freed themselves from the anthropocentric perspective that underlies their whole outlook on nature. This results, in my view, from a failure to achieve true objectivity of judgment. Only a change in their total world view regarding the place of humans in the system of nature can bring about the liberation of their consciousness from such human-centeredness. Until that liberation occurs (with the accompanying moral transformation) they will no doubt continue to hold themselves superior to all other living things on Earth.

I have not argued here for the equality of inherent worth between humans and nonhumans. This requires a detailed explication of an outlook on nature
that makes it appropriate to extend the same level of respect to animals and plants as we extend to persons in our human ethics. It must also be shown that such an outlook on nature is acceptable to all rational and scientifically informed moral agents. (That argument was presented at least in outline form in my earlier paper.)

I have also omitted here any discussion of the principles that are needed to determine fair ways to resolve conflicts between duties owed to animals and plants and duties owed to persons. All I wish to point out in this connection is that the equality of worth of humans and nonhumans does not preclude the possibility of being fair. If we can not only strive to be fair to all, but also make some headway in achieving an approximation to the ethical ideal of fairness in situations of competing claims among persons, there is no reason why we cannot also strive for fairness and hope to achieve at least some degree of fairness in dealing with incompatible claims between persons on the one hand and animals and plants on the other. But until we get rid of our own biases and distortions stemming from the anthropocentricity of our history and our culture, we will not even be able to take the first step. If we are to have clarity of understanding and genuine open-mindedness in dealing with the problem of competing claims, nothing less than a revolution in our ordinary ethical vision will be required of us. Such a revolution has already taken place in modern history with respect to egalitarian principles governing the moral relations among human persons. In the domain of ethics concerned with the moral relations between persons and other living things a similar revolution is now our highest and noblest moral calling.