

Biocentrism

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Abstract

The orthodox approach to the environment and its inhabitants is deemed to be anthropocentric in that it recognises the moral standing of human beings alone, and as such other beings are given at the most indirect moral consideration when their interests conflict with the interests of humans. However, many global environmental problems and worldwide practices directly affect not just human beings but many other creatures too. In the light of this, the anthropocentric approach has been accused by some philosophers of being too narrowly focused on human interests to creditably account for the true extent of our moral obligations. This article provides a conceptual outline of biocentrism as an alternative approach to ethics; one which widens the moral scope to include all living beings as candidates deserving of moral consideration. The article also discusses how this approach might be applied to contemporary ethical issues which are international in their dimension, including environmental issues, as well as issues concerning our use of animals in worldwide human practices.

Keywords

Biocentrism, environmental ethics, interests, animals, humans, global warming

Introduction

In the last fifty years a heightening of consciousness regarding global environmental problems and issues concerning our treatment of animals in worldwide practices has meant that many of these problems and issues have been brought to the forefront of philosophical enquiry with many philosophers presenting challenges to the traditional approach to the environment and its inhabitants; an approach which has been thought by some philosophers to be too human-centred to sufficiently address environmental and animal welfare concerns. Indeed, while the traditional ethical stance with regard to the environment and animals is anthropocentric in that it limits direct moral consideration to human beings alone, other

stances extend the scope of moral concern to other than human creatures. In the light of current environmental issues, the global extent of these issues, and the treatment of animals in practices such as intensive rearing and animal experimentation (brought to our attention by many writers, not least by Peter Singer, 1995 [1975]), there is a need to address to whom we have responsibilities and why. Only once these questions have been answered does it make sense to deliberate on the content of our responsibilities (see further Cochrane, 2007). Biocentrism is a stance in environmental ethics which makes a claim about the extent of our obligations and in doing so provides answers to these questions.

History and development

In the 1970's there was a heightened awareness of the global environmental impacts of pollution, industry, the use of pesticides and herbicides (as highlighted by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, 2000 [1962]), and of the problems caused by overpopulation, including those related to our overuse of natural resources (brought to the public's attention by Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, 1968). Both these books suggested that human beings needed to re-examine their relationship with the nonhuman world. This period of increased consciousness regarding global environmental problems brought with it a host of issues and questions which became the focus of interest for many philosophers. Indeed, it was during this time that environmental philosophy may be seen to emerge as a branch of philosophy (see Attfield, 2014: ch. 2; Cochrane, 2007).

Orthodox ethical approaches to the extent of our moral responsibilities are anthropocentric in that direct moral concern is limited to human beings. According to anthropocentric perspectives, humans are the only beings with morally significant interests or the only beings recognised as having moral standing. (A thing has moral standing if it should be included in our moral considerations or if it matters in a moral sense.)

When environmental philosophy emerged, the arguments put forward by some philosophers were in direct opposition to this traditional human-centred approach to our relationship with the natural world and its inhabitants. In enquiring into the extent of our responsibilities to the nonhuman world and why we have such responsibilities, some philosophers advocated a new approach to ethics, arguing that, in its recognition of the moral standing of humans only, the traditional anthropocentric view is too

narrow an ethic to deal adequately with global environmental problems (many of which are thought to be caused in the first place by a human chauvinistic approach to the nonhuman world). Indeed, many environmental philosophers argued for the sphere of morality to be extended to include other than human creatures and even whole ecosystems. Authors whose work was influential in advocating a new approach to ethics included Richard Sylvan (formerly Richard Routley) (1973), and Arne Naess (1973).

In addition, with the emergence of environmental philosophy there also emerged a range of environmental ethics stances, biocentrism included, each of which stipulated to which things we have obligations and why, and as such each of which said something about the extent of our moral responsibilities. Philosophers also enquired into the kind(s) of value that the nonhuman world may have, with some of them presenting thought experiments to support the claim that the natural world has intrinsic value (see Sylvan's Last Man example, 1973; and Donald Scherer's Planet Lifeless and Planet Flora thought experiment, 1983); intrinsic value being a nonderivative or an independent value, a value that is distinct from instrumental value (the latter being the value which some entity has according to its use).

Another influential work in the field of environmental philosophy was that of Joel Feinberg's 'The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations' (1974) in which he suggested that only beings that have interests can be regarded as having moral standing. However, while there is an agreement generally about the link between interests and morality, there is much less agreement about which things have morally relevant interests, and so in the related literature philosophers to date have attempted to provide answers to the question of the criterion for moral standing or for the possession of morally relevant interests. The question of the criterion for moral relevance is of fundamental importance if one is interested in developing a respectful relationship with the natural world. The reason why this is so is because an answer to this question will not only determine the extent of our moral responsibilities and their content but will also enable one to determine whether the current ethic regarding our responsibilities towards the natural world is justifiable.

Biocentrism and its definition

This paper has already mentioned anthropocentrism as a normative stance in environmental ethics that recognises the moral standing of human beings alone. According to this stance, humans only have interests of a morally relevant kind; being human is both a necessary and sufficient condition for having direct moral relevance. Other stances are less restrictive in that they recognise the moral standing of a wider range of creatures. Sentientism, for example, is a stance which claims that all and only sentient beings have moral standing; according to sentientists, being sentient is both a necessary and sufficient condition for having direct moral consideration.

Biocentrism is even less restrictive than sentientism claiming as it does that all living things have moral standing. According to biocentrists, being a living thing is both a necessary and sufficient condition for direct moral relevance, for all and only living things have morally relevant interests and a good of their own. This view then would include trees and other non-sentient beings as creatures that should be recognised as deserving of moral consideration in their own right. While this view is much less exclusive than anthropocentrism or sentientism, all these stances claim that it is individual living things that matter morally, not systems. These stances, then, can be contrasted with ecocentrism: a stance which claims that, rather than individual creatures having moral standing, systems (ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole) are to be recognised as deserving of direct moral concern. However, biocentrists (and advocates of anthropocentrism or sentientism) could take the good of ecosystems into account as an instrumental good, since the preservation of ecosystems is vital for the survival of the individuals who exist in those systems.

Morality and its scope

In his article 'On Being Morally Considerable' (1978) Kenneth Goodpaster presents a biocentric stance with respect to questions about the moral considerability of the nonhuman world. (Goodpaster was the first to introduce the term 'moral considerability', which means 'deserving moral consideration'.) He notes that any enquiry into which things deserve moral consideration is essentially an enquiry into the necessary and sufficient conditions for moral considerability, where something's deserving moral consideration is independent of whether that thing has rights (Goodpaster, 1978: 309) — for something could have moral standing without it having

rights or without anything about its having rights being held to follow. Indeed, in their recognition of the moral standing of all living things biocentrists are not required to claim that living things have rights. A being has moral standing if it ought to be included among that class of entities that we normally consider to require consideration from a moral perspective, and such inclusion would require that it have interests that are morally relevant. Whether we do actually take its interests into consideration is a different matter, as is whether that being has rights.

One might ask here, ‘What is the link between interests and moral standing?’, or ‘Why is it supposed that only beings with interests have moral standing?’ In answer to these questions, entities with interests are entities that can be affected for better or worse by the actions of an agent. Indeed, Feinberg suggests that to have interests a being must be capable of being harmed or benefited. A being that has no interests does not possess this capability (Feinberg, 1974: 51).

Similarly, Goodpaster points out that there is an essential link between beneficence and morality (Goodpaster, 1978: 318-19, and 321). Those things that can be harmed or benefited will naturally deserve moral consideration (*ibid.*: 321). However, unlike Goodpaster, Feinberg talks restrictively about interests, claiming that interests belong to beings that have certain conative characteristics, such as hopes, drives, wants, goals, aims, or desires (Feinberg, 1974: 49). This excludes many beings from having morally relevant interests, including plants and trees. Further, Feinberg strongly suggests that plants have instrumental value only (*ibid.*: 54).

However, contrary to Feinberg’s sentientist stance, some argue that trees and plants do have interests of their own, or a good of their own, and as such can be harmed or benefited by moral agents. While trees do not have a mental life, biocentrists argue that nevertheless they have characteristics sufficient for the possession of interests. Robin Attfield is one such biocentrist. In an aptly named paper entitled ‘The Good of Trees’ he argues that non-conscious living entities such as trees have a non-derivative good of their own, including interests in growth, reproduction and self-maintenance; interests independent of their utility value and independent of the value judgments of human beings. Trees, for example, maintain and heal themselves, they have the capacity for self-repair, growth and reproduction, and as such Attfield claims that it is hard to deny that they have interests of their own (Attfield, 1994 [1981]: 157). In saying that all individual non-

conscious animals and plants have interests, Attfield then goes beyond sentientism, and is firmly in the biocentrist camp.

Similarly, Goodpaster claims that it is not just sentient beings that can be harmed, arguing that while the capacity to suffer and experience pleasure may be sufficient for moral standing, it is not necessary (1978: 316). Indeed, for Goodpaster, all (and only) living things are capable of being beneficiaries. Inanimate objects, such as rocks, cannot be benefited or harmed, and so have no place in morality. That a being can suffer though is not insignificant in terms of making judgments regarding which interests should take precedence in cases of conflict. Indeed, that a being is capable of pain and suffering may well make that being's interests more morally significant in cases of conflict than the interests of a being who lacks such a capacity (for the distinction between moral standing and moral significance, see Goodpaster, 1978: 311-12). Judgments regarding moral significance are aimed at weighting morally relevant factors in cases where interests clash; such factors could include the type of interests at stake (whether they are basic or trivial, for example) and the species-specific capacities of the creatures concerned (whether, for example, they are sentient and thus capable of suffering, whether they are self-conscious, or whether they are capable of planning for the future). A being could have moral standing and at the same time have little moral significance when its interests clash with the interests of other beings (more will be said below in relation to the distinction between moral standing and moral significance).

Other notable biocentrist philosophers include Paul Taylor (1986). Taylor can be described as a 'biocentric egalitarian'. As a biocentrist he claims that all living entities have moral standing, but unlike some biocentrists he claims that all living things have the same inherent worth (ibid.: 155). For Taylor, to say that a being has inherent worth is to say that it has a good regardless of its usefulness and of whether it is valued by humans. In this sense living things have a value for their own sake irrespective of their value in relation to other things (ibid.: 71-77). More recently, James Sterba has presented a modified and developed version of egalitarian biocentrism; the presentation of which is endorsed by Taylor (Sterba, 2010 [2005]: 190, n. 4).

It is important to note here that biocentrism is a stance in environmental ethics regarding which beings have moral standing and why; it is not a theory regarding what makes actions right or wrong. This is true of the other stances mentioned above too. In respect of claims about what makes actions

right (or wrong), environmental ethicists may support one of a number of different normative theories. For example, Peter Singer (1995 [1975]) and Tom Regan (2003 [1983]) are both sentientists but the former advocates a form of utilitarianism whilst the latter supports a rights-based theory. Utilitarianism is a variety of consequentialism which regards right action as that which produces the greatest balance of pleasure or preference satisfaction over pain or frustration of preference. Rights-based theories, however, tend to be deontological. Deontological theories, in contrast to consequentialist ones, maintain that that which makes an action right (or wrong) is not dependent on its consequences. According to such theories, actions are right if they comply with certain principles or rules which one has an obligation to follow. Relatedly, Regan argues that we have a *prima facie* moral duty not to harm certain animals. This brief discussion of normative theory serves to indicate that advocates of the same environmental ethics stance need not adopt the same normative theory and as such the detail of their overall theories may well diverge.

With respect to biocentrism, it was said above that Taylor's biocentrism is egalitarian in the sense that all living things are considered to have the same worth. That creatures have inherent worth, for Taylor, creates a *prima facie* duty to promote the good of creatures for their own sake (Taylor, 1986: 75). In this way at least, Taylor's approach may be considered to be deontological. One challenge for Taylor's egalitarian biocentrism is whether it gives sufficient scope for drawing distinctions between different beings when the interests of or duties to different beings conflict. Taylor attempts to overcome this challenge by formulating a set of principles to follow in such events, one of which is that basic interests should take precedence when they conflict with non-basic ones (*ibid.*: 269-80). But as Cochrane notes, if there is a conflict between my interest in removing weeds from my garden (a non-basic interest) and a weed's interest in continued survival (a basic interest), the weed's interest should, on Taylor's view, then trump my interest, and many would regard such a conclusion as overly demanding (Cochrane, 2007). However, Taylor's principle that basic interests should trump non-basic ones is creditable theoretically — where the non-basic and basic interests of humans conflict we usually suppose that the latter interests should take moral precedence. In the light of this and if one regards all creatures as being worthy of direct moral concern then it is reasonable to claim that one can suppose that basic interests should take moral precedence over less basic ones, irrespective of whether the beings concerned are human or nonhuman. Nevertheless, without further guidance Taylor's principle

could be quite counter-intuitive in practice, as Cochrane's example of conflicts between the interests of weeds and humans well shows.

Another of Taylor's principles states that in the event of a conflict between the basic interest of a human and of an animal, the human concerned is not required to sacrifice her own good for the sake of the animal concerned. For Taylor, since animals are not of greater worth than humans there is no reason to suppose that humans should forgo fulfilling their own basic interests for the sake of animals whose interests conflict with their own (see Taylor, 1986: 293-94). However, it is not clear that this latter principle coheres with his overall stance. Theoretically Taylor's position, calling as it does for recognition of the equal worth of all living things, could well be indifferent with regards to which basic interests we have a responsibility to further when the basic interests of humans and animals conflict. For example, if water is scarce, and there is an option of giving a certain amount of water to a dying man or a dying plant, in theory Taylor's egalitarianism could be indifferent with regards to which being we give the water (see Attfield, 2014: 43). Note that this is a problem to do more with Taylor's egalitarian position than with his biocentrism.

Relatedly, it is not a problem which applies to those biocentric stances which do not claim that all living things have equal inherent worth. For example, with respect to Attfield's biocentric theory recognition of the moral standing of all living things is compatible with recognising the differing value of beings, as well as compatible with the claim that when interests conflict, some interests may be more morally significant than others (ibid.: 43). With regards to the question of what makes actions right (or wrong), Attfield advocates a form of consequentialism which allows one to recognise that (when interests conflict) the interests of creatures with, for example, the capacity for sentience may well be more morally significant than the interests of creatures which lack this capacity. As such, in the aforementioned case of the dying man and the dying plant, Attfield's biocentrism, informed as it is by a form of consequentialism which regards the capacities of creatures as significant when making decisions in moral matters, permits one to say that the interests of the dying man should take moral precedence over the interests of the dying plant (see further Attfield, 2014: 42-45). Attfield's biocentrism, then, can be found to avoid the problem inherent in Taylor's egalitarian approach; specifically it can avoid the problem of not being able to account for the morally relevant differences between beings.

Disanalogies and conflicts of interests

Despite the fact that biocentrism need not be susceptible to unique problems with regard to overcoming conflicts of interests, in the environmental philosophy literature there has tended to be a reluctance to regard non-sentient things as having moral standing (as noted by Goodpaster, 1978: 321). Goodpaster suggests that this reluctance may be down to people's conception of the good (ibid.: 321). For example, if one's conception of the good is essentially hedonistic, that is one views only pleasure as of intrinsic positive value and only suffering as of intrinsic negative value, one will recognise only sentient beings as capable of being beneficiaries and will not regard non-sentient things as having any interests, and therefore as deserving of moral consideration (for arguments against hedonism in the context of a discussion of biocentrism and sentientism, see Rodogno, 2010). However, if one has a wider conception of the good — a conception which is bound to, for example, a notion of flourishing or thriving — then plausibly one could include non-sentient creatures as beings which are capable of having interests the fulfilment of which is conducive to their own good.

There are, of course, many disanalogies that can be made between sentient and non-sentient things. For example, trees, unlike mammals, have no feelings, thoughts or desires. As such, they are not interested in and cannot take an interest in what we do to them. However, being able to take an interest in something or other is very different from being able to have an interest in something or other, and for the biocentrist, while non-sentient creatures are not capable of the former unlike many other creatures, such a dissimilarity does not hinder the fact that they have morally relevant interests which make them candidates for moral consideration. Indeed, Taylor makes a similar claim, arguing that it is not necessary for a being to take an interest in its own life or to be conscious in order for it to have a good of its own (1986: 63-68).

Further, Attfield argues that we can talk of what is in a being's interests or good whether or not that being can take an interest in its life or reflect upon its own good. For Attfield, the good of living things lies in their flourishing in a way that is natural or distinctive to their species, but, as for Taylor, that a living thing can thrive does not depend on that living thing being able to take an interest in its own life (Attfield, 1994 [1981]: 157). Indeed, Attfield argues that there are certain states of affairs, including flourishing and well-

being, which are independently or intrinsically valuable; they are good-in-themselves, and for no other reason beyond themselves, rather than good-in-relation to other things (see Attfield, 2014: 12, 24-25, and 49). Such states of affairs are ones which may well be of instrumental value too, but they are states of affairs which it makes sense to speak about in relation to the lives of all living creatures, both sentient and non-sentient.

It is worth noting that there are of course human beings who are not able to take an interest in their own lives, but few would say that such humans do not have a good of their own or interests of their own that we can further or damage by our actions. Yet if we recognise that such humans have a good, then the biocentrist may claim that in all consistency we should recognise the same of other creatures which are not able to take an interest in their lives.

Goodpaster recognises that in cases of conflict the interests of, say, a tree may well be overridden by the interests of a sentient being. But he further claims that such cases point to the distinction between moral standing and moral significance. (Goodpaster, 1978: 311, and 322-23). Following Goodpaster, Attfield also claims that there is a difference between moral standing and moral significance. A being could have moral standing, and at the same time have little significance in cases of conflicts of interests.

As suggested above, Attfield takes a capacities-based approach, arguing that in cases of conflict different capacities and interests should be weighted appropriately. As such, it *may* be the case that a being with greater capacities has more moral significance than one with lesser capacities when their interests conflict. But much will depend on the interests at stake, as well as the capacities of the creatures concerned. For Attfield, all other things beings equal, basic interests take moral precedence over less basic ones, but like interests should be given equal consideration (Attfield, 2014: 42-45). (For discussion of the principle of equal consideration of like interests and its applicability to nonhuman beings, see Singer, 1995 [1975])

Moral obligations and their extent

That said there are two challenges which are commonly directed against biocentrism. The first of these relates to the scope of moral concern; to where biocentrists draw the line with regard to those beings which they consider to have moral standing. It should by now be clear that the

biocentrist draws the line at life, but one may question why this is so. If, for example, all living things are included, why not include non-living natural things, such as mountains, rivers and stones, and even man-made things, such as cars or machines? Such a question is often meant to suggest that the biocentrist has drawn an arbitrary line, or has cast the net so wide that it makes little sense not to include nearly everything on earth.

Biocentrists could meet this challenge by claiming that our commitments extend to those beings that have a good of their own or interests, and that nonliving things do not have a good of their own or interests. The good of, say, machines is not an independent good, but the good of the users or manufacturers. Rocks and mountains, it could further be argued, also do not have a good of their own (see, for example, Taylor, 1986: 61-62; see further Rodogno, 2010). However, with respect to, say, trees, the biocentrist would claim that they certainly do have a good of their own independent of the value ascribed to them by humans. Trees have some interests and capacities similar to those things we usually consider to have moral standing; they have capacities for growth, self-repair, self-preservation and the capacity to flourish more generally, just as sentient beings do. There is then an analogous argument for holding that trees and other living things have moral standing; an argument that cannot be applied to the case of non-living things.

The second challenge relates to a concern regarding the implications of biocentrism in practice. It might be objected that one could not live properly if one accepted this stance, for then one would have to consider the interests of all living things (including, for example, mosquitoes, flies, and bacteria); interests the fulfilment of which could well either endanger one's own life or at least make it nigh on impossible to go about one's business (for this and other objections, see Goodpaster, 1978: 322-25). Relatedly, one might further object that it is not humanly possible to consider the interests of all living creatures, but that biocentrism requires us to do just that.

However, biocentrism does not require that moral agents refrain from killing all animals; nor does it require impossible deliberations regarding the interests of each and every living thing on the planet. For the biocentrist, ethical deliberations require a consideration of the interests of affected parties only. In addition, biocentrists are free to recognise that while all living things have moral standing, the interests of some creatures will outweigh the interests of others in cases of conflict. The latter claim regarding interests is as true for biocentrists, as it is for anthropocentrists.

Indeed, we make such comparative judgements when the interests of human beings conflict, and there is (the biocentrist could argue) no reason to suppose that we cannot do the same when the interests in question include those of nonhuman creatures. The ethical theories of many biocentrists enable them to say that comparative judgements can be similarly made when the conflicting interests in question include those of nonhuman creatures. Again, vectors, such as mosquitoes and flies, could have moral standing and, at the same time, have little moral significance, meaning that their interests are often trumped by the interests of sentient creatures who can be fatally harmed by the diseases which these insects are capable of transmitting.

Implications for animals and the environment

Adoption of a biocentric stance has implications of a global nature, related to a worldwide set of issues. Some of these implications and issues will be discussed in this section.

Global warming is one of the biggest issues facing us today. It poses a threat not just to human beings, but to other species too. Adoption of a biocentric stance in the face of the problems related to climate change would demand that we consider not just intra-species issues (including ones of intergenerational and international equity), but inter-species ones too, including issues of equity between species (see further Attfield, 2014: 204-207). There is, of course, a pressing need to introduce effective mitigation and adaptation strategies for the sake of human beings, but many animals are already being affected by climate change and may well outlive humanity. If animals have a good of their own and have interests that matter in a moral sense, then making efforts to stabilize emissions is all the more important, for there are then more interests directly at stake than could be supposed on the orthodox view. Aiding the survival of nonhuman creatures and their habitats now and for the future is then a matter of ethics and should be taken seriously along with those issues of climate change that relate to the good of human beings.

Biodiversity preservation and pollutions are just two further global environmental issues that affect not only human beings but nonhuman creatures too, both sentient and non-sentient ones. Biodiversity is essential to maintaining a sustainable natural environment for all living organisms, and as such has an important role to play in the preservation of healthy ecosystems. But where a loss of biodiversity does not affect or cannot be

seen to affect human beings, the traditional anthropocentric ethic cannot account for what is wrong with such a loss. According to biocentrism, however, the extinction of individual members of a particular species is harmful not only to the individuals of that species who have an interest in continued existence, but also potentially harmful to individuals of different species whose own good depends on the survival of other species. For the biocentrist, preservation of biodiversity is to be promoted not for the sake of species themselves (as ecocentrists would claim), but for the sake of individual members of species. In this way, the biocentrist can provide reasons for protecting species even when doing so cannot be said to promote human interests. (For example, undiscovered plant and animal life in the rainforests cannot be said to promote the interests of humans, yet such life has moral standing according to biocentrism and as such is deserving of moral consideration. For further discussion, see Attfield, 2014: 76.)

Similarly to the loss of biodiversity, pollutions have harmful impacts on both human and nonhuman beings, sentient and non-sentient. A biocentric ethic would call for us to exercise constraint in the interests of all affected living individuals with respect to those actions, practices and technologies which cause pollutions, even if doing so sometimes means sacrificing our own interests. In the light of the urgent need to mitigate global warming, this is particularly true with respect to air pollution, especially carbon emissions, but is also true of other pollutants that undermine the ability of living creatures to fulfil their own good.

Another global issue concerns the use of animals in worldwide commercial practices, such as factory farming and animal experimentation. These practices involve the use of billions of animals, and cause many animals to suffer considerably. A biocentric ethic would call for a fair consideration of the interests of these animals, and for recognition that the animals used have a good of their own (independent of their use for humans) and should be treated as such. Even accepting that the interests of humans may sometimes outweigh the interests of animals, much of the suffering of these animals is avoidable and significant, and their basic interests are often outweighed by less significant ones (see Singer, 1995 [1975]). As such, on a biocentric ethic many of the ways in which we treat animals in these practices could be deemed unjustifiable. If so, we would have an obligation to revise our practices and change (for the better) our treatment of farm animals and animals used in experimentation.

Much the same applies where animals suffer through other human practices, including the use of bears for their bile and the use of animals for their fur. Practices such as these cause atrocious suffering to the animals concerned, suffering that would be considered unjust if inflicted upon human beings for the same purposes. In these cases, the animals' significant interests in not suffering are overridden by less weighty interests, and where the biocentrist recognises that this is so, obligations are incurred to assist these animals.

Another area of concern is our use of animals in genetic engineering. According to the biocentrist, animals have a good of their own, and a value independent of their use to humans. This confers obligations on humans whenever we can affect the good of animals. As such, when animals are brought into existence by humans to be used in research related to genetic engineering, this confers a responsibility on those humans to consider the good of those animals, including their quality of life and the fulfillment (rather than the truncation) of their capacities.

Conclusion

Biocentrism is a stance in environmental ethics which extends the scope of morality much wider than traditional ethics to include all living creatures. On the basis that all living creatures are capable of being beneficiaries and as such all have morally relevant interests, the biocentrist claims that all have moral standing. Whilst all biocentrists claim that all living individual creatures have moral standing, they may differ with regard to which normative theory they endorse. In affect, this means that the complexities of one biocentrist's overall ethical theory may differ from another's, with some theories being more workable in practice than others. Biocentrism, however, offers the environmental ethicist a way to account for what is wrong with harming living creatures, whether sentient or non-sentient, and provides a firm basis upon which to respond fairly and creditably to global issues and problems.

Cross references

Animal Ethics, Animal Research, Animal Welfare, Anthropocentrism, Applied Ethics, Benefit and Harm, Bioethics: Environmental, Bioethics: Global, Biosphere, Conflict of Interest, Ecocentrism, Environmental Ethics, Ethics, Experimentation, Exploitation, Food Ethics, Genetic Modification

(GMOs): Animals, Moral Status, Pain, Quality of Life, Research: Animals, Suffering, Utilitarianism, Values, Welfare, World Ethics

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