

Human Virtues and Natural Values

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Abstract

In several works, Holmes Rolston III has argued that a satisfactory environmental ethic cannot be built on a virtue ethical foundation. His first argument amounts to the charge that because virtue ethics is by nature 'self-centred' or egoistic it is also inherently 'human-centred' and hence ill suited to treating environmental matters. According to his second argument, virtue ethics is perniciously human-centred since it 'locates' the value of a thing, not in the thing itself, but in the agent who is 'ennobled' by valuing it. I argue that these charges, though illuminating, are not in the final analysis compelling. The first, I suggest, misconceives the role of motivation in virtue ethics, while the second ultimately rests on a misunderstanding of the place of the human perspective in ethical considerations.

Human Virtues and Natural Values

1.

Neat and crisp definitions of ‘virtue ethics’ are hard to provide, but one suggestion, as good as any, is that it is that ethical approach for which judgements of character are primary.¹ While other kinds of ethicist emphasise other matters – maximising utility, say, or the securing of moral rights – the virtue ethicist is primarily concerned with the character of the agent, with her virtues and vices and, more generally, with the shape of her life as a whole.

At first sight, this emphasis on human character might seem very ‘anthropocentric’ and quite at odds with a proper moral concern for the nonhuman world. Yet in recent years there has been a good deal of interest in the possibility of applying virtue ethics to environmental issues. Writers such as Philip Cafaro, Louke van Wensveen and Geoffrey Frasz have shown how reflecting on human character can shed light on our moral relations with the nonhuman world.²

Not all writers are so optimistic, however. Robert Elliot, for instance, has concluded that the ‘prospect of a virtue-based environmental ethic seem dim’.³ Moreover, in various works, Holmes Rolston III has raised several incisive objections to the very idea of an environmental virtue ethic.⁴ My aim, in this paper, is to rebut Rolston’s criticisms, and thereby to show, more generally, that virtue ethics is not ‘human-centred’ in any sense that ought to perturb environmental thinkers.

2.

In making his case, Rolston runs together several distinct arguments, which we will need to tease apart. His first is indicated by claims such as the following:

The other cannot be seen simply as a source of personal transformation.⁵

It is virtuous to recognize the rights of other persons, but the motivating force is their rights that I appreciate, not my self-respect.⁶

Both these claims are couched as responses to the virtue ethicist: they both amount to the contention that, *pace* the virtue ethicist, concern for others cannot be grounded in self-interest. At first sight, then, Rolston would seem to be resurrecting the old charge that virtue ethical theories are by nature self-centred or egoistic.⁷

In order to see why anyone might think this charge compelling, it may be helpful to consider some more general features of virtue ethics. As good a place as any to start in this is with ‘eudaimonism’, the thesis that a virtue may be defined as a character trait a human being needs for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well.⁸ Virtue ethicists have traditionally subscribed to some kind of eudaimonism.⁹ Thus for Aristotle, to say that justice and courage are virtues is to say that the unjust or cowardly man cannot have lived well, that he must have fallen short of achieving well-being. This emphasis on the importance of promoting well-being has led some writers to worry that in acting virtuously the virtuous agent must be motivated by a self-centred or egoistic concern to promote his or her own well-being.

I assume this is the view Rolston means to express in the quotations above. However, Rolston is an *environmental* ethicist and he believes that the charge of egoism militates, not just against virtue ethics generally, but more particularly against the notion that a virtue ethical theory can provide an adequate account of our moral relations with the natural world. In this he would seem, at first glance at least, to be correct: if virtue ethical theories are thought to be inherently egoistic or self-centred then, since the self in question is *de facto* a human self, they will also be human-centred (in a sense to be explained presently); and if they are human-centred then they are supposed to be ill suited to dealing with environmental issues.¹⁰

A view of this kind is implied in the following passage:

The preservation of [a particular kind of desert fish] is not covertly the cultivation of human excellences; the lives of these fish in the desert is the overt value defended... It seems unexcellent – cheap and philistine – to say that excellence of character is what we are after when we preserve these endangered species.¹¹

The ‘what we are after’ implies that, in Rolston’s view, the virtue ethicist subscribes to the notion that what motivates people to protect rare desert fish is the desire to better themselves, a desire that is both self-centred (the conservationist wants to better herself) and human-centred (because the self in question is human). This human-centredness, moreover, is thought to be a bad thing since it involves treating some part of the natural world (in this case, the fish) as valuable only to the extent that it serves human interests.

3.

One can respond to these arguments in various ways; in this paper, however, I will try to show, *pace* Rolston, that virtue ethical theories are not by nature egoistic or self-centred, for if they are not self-centred then one will not be justified, on these grounds at least, in accusing them of human-centredness.

So is virtue ethics inherently egoistic? Well, it is certainly the case that, according to some virtue ethical theories, a desire to be *regarded* as virtuous will motivate one to act virtuously. This lies at the heart of Aristotle’s virtue of magnanimity, for instance, the virtue expressed in extravagant displays of wealth and generosity.

I am myself sympathetic to the view that most of us are, more often than we are prepared to admit, motivated to act well for selfish reasons. But there is no reason why a concern to be well

thought of must, of necessity, be accorded a central role in one's economy of virtue. Aristotle's is not the only ideal of human excellence, and other accounts of the ends of human life see little or no virtue in a desire to be well regarded.¹² For these reasons one would not be justified, on these grounds, in concluding that virtue ethical theories are inherently egoistic or self-centred.

Yet the charge of egoism can be rephrased. Perhaps, one might argue, virtue ethics is self-centred because of its assumption that the virtuous agent must be motivated to act well by a desire to become an exemplary individual. Consider the heroic ideal, for example. It seems reasonable to suppose that men such as Achilles and Beowulf act proudly, impetuously and bravely precisely because they want to become proud, impetuous and brave, and that they want to develop these qualities, not only because they want to be regarded as excellent individuals, but because they themselves want to become excellent individuals.

The first thing to note here is that there is no reason why a virtue ethic must endorse the claim that a virtuous person is motivated by a desire to become an exemplary individual, and so one would not be justified in accusing all virtue ethical theories of being egoistic or self-centred on these grounds.¹³ Moreover, I am not convinced that, even when one considers those theories that advocate heroic ideals, the heroic figures in question may justly be condemned as self-absorbed, and so I am not convinced that virtue ethical theories according to which such heroic ideals are vaunted must be dismissed as self-centred. It simply isn't clear to me that someone who acts well out of a desire to become a noble or outstanding character ought necessarily to be condemned. At the very least, his self-centredness – if such it is – ought to be distinguished from the self-centredness of the merely selfish individual, and not simply because he probably has a more developed notion of what his self-interest consists in.¹⁴

So it is questionable whether it would be right, on these grounds at least, to dismiss virtue ethical theories as egoistic or self-centred. But the charge of self-centredness fails for other reasons too. For by the lights of any plausible virtue ethical theory, a virtuous agent will be motivated, not only (if at all) by a desire to better themselves, but also by other concerns.

Consider other-regarding virtues (dispositions to help others for their own sakes). Within the context of a eudaimonist virtue ethic, other-regarding character traits will count as virtues because they contribute to the well-being of the agent. So if benevolence – or indeed any other-regarding trait – is a virtue, then acting benevolently will typically be good for the benevolent agent.¹⁵ However, to say that acting benevolently might make one a better person is not to say that one acts benevolently *in order to* become a better person. The benevolent agent does not act solely from a concern to promote her own well-being; indeed, if she did so, she would not be genuinely benevolent.¹⁶ She acts out of benevolence, which is to say that she is motivated to act by her perception of others in need of help.

As we have seen, Rolston occasionally seems to assume, mistakenly, that the virtuous person must be motivated solely by self-interest. However, one suspects that even he doesn't find these claims wholly convincing since, in other passages, he maintains that although it is possible to be virtuous, the person who acts virtuously because acting in that way promotes their own well-being is not genuinely virtuous at all. 'To be truly virtuous', he writes, 'one must respect values in nature for their own sake and not as tributary to human flourishing'.¹⁷

4.

Now, however, Rolston thinks he has the virtue ethicist caught on the horns of a dilemma. Either one values things in the world for self-centred reasons, because one thinks that valuing them will prove suitably 'ennobling', or one 'respect[s] values in nature for their own sake and not as tributary to human flourishing'. As we have seen, Rolston finds the first horn of the dilemma unacceptable (he concludes that it 'hardly seems ethical').¹⁸ The second horn of the dilemma, however, seems to commit one to an account of environmental concern that rests, not on one's account of the virtues, but on some conception of non-aretaic value, that is, on some account of those values that may be defined without reference to the character of the agent. And in this,

second case it is difficult to see why the account thus developed would constitute an environmental *virtue* ethic at all:

To be truly virtuous one must respect values in nature for their own sake and not as tributary to human flourishing. But if indeed intrinsic value in nature has become primary to the ethic, to call such an ethic a (human) environmental virtue ethics is no longer an adequately descriptive title... Such an ethic is best called a value-based ethic, not a virtue-based ethic.¹⁹

At first sight, this dilemma might appear to be false. For it might seem that a virtue ethicist who accepts the presence of selfless motivation (and thus escapes the first horn of the dilemma) might nonetheless eschew any commitment to non-aretaic values (and so avoid the second). In order to see how this might be achieved consider the following example.

Imagine a conservationist, Sarah, who, motivated by altruism, perceives our aforementioned desert fish to be valuable in itself. Both Rolston and the virtue ethicist can accept that, far from being anthropocentric, Sarah's efforts to conserve the fish are motivated by her sense that the fish has value in itself. Both can agree that she values the fish for its own sake.²⁰

Rolston and the virtue ethicist therefore agree on how things seem to Sarah, they agree, in other words, on where value is *located* (i.e., 'in' the fish). Yet they provide divergent accounts of the *source* of that value.²¹ According to Rolston, Sarah is responding to values that are, not just non-aretaic, but objective, in the sense that they may be defined without reference to humans.²² By contrast, the virtue ethicist will insist that to say that Sarah values the fish for its own sake is to say that the creature is perceived as having non-instrumental value, value over and above its use-value. But he will add that to say that the fish has non-instrumental value is not necessarily to say that it has this value objectively, independently of the valuing agent; it is only to say that it is *valued* non-instrumentally. The virtue ethicist can, in other words, accommodate talk of valuing

the fish 'for its own sake' or for what it is 'in itself' without buying into the notion that the fish has objective value in Rolston's sense.²³

5.

Rolston's dilemma seems, therefore, to rely on an equivocation on the notion of valuing something 'for its own sake'. And because of this it would appear that the virtue ethicist can avoid being caught on either of its horns. Nonetheless, the virtue ethicist is not yet home and dry. For Rolston's dilemma argument can be sharpened. More precisely, it can be modified to show that a virtue ethical theory must be in a sense human-centred, even if it does not incorporate a self-centred account of motivation.

The following claim from Rolston indicates how this might be done:

The wild other does not become valuable if and when it results in something valuable for me. It is valuable for what it is, whether I am around or not...²⁴

Consider the first sentence. It implies that, according to virtue ethics, the 'wild other' (the desert fish, for example) becomes valuable if and when it results in something valuable for the agent. The meaning of this claim is ambiguous, however. On the one hand, it could be taken to mean that an agent will only be motivated to value the 'wild other' if she thinks that doing so will be to her benefit. On the other, it could mean that, according to virtue ethics, the 'wild other' has value if and only if it benefits the agent to value it, *regardless of how the agent is motivated*. It could mean, in other words, that even if one's motivation for valuing the fish is entirely altruistic, the fish's value remains a function of how such acts of valuing prove ennobling for humans.

If the passage is interpreted in the first way, Rolston's argument fails. But if he is able to demonstrate the truth of the second reading, then he will have shown that a virtue ethical theory

must be in a sense human-centred, even if it does not incorporate a self-centred account of motivation.

An argument for the truth of the second reading runs as follows.²⁵ We saw that the virtue ethicist's account of the value of the fish amounts to the claim that Sarah sees the fish as having a non-instrumental value, and we noted that this claim does not commit her or anyone else to the notion that the fish has objective value. Instead, in saying that Sarah values the fish non-instrumentally, the virtue ethicist is merely saying something about Sarah's character, that she is disposed to value such things as fish in what Kant would call a disinterested manner. But now consider how the virtue ethicist might reply if he is asked why the fish should be valued in this way, why, in other words, it has the (non-instrumental) value it does. If the virtue ethicist is a eudaimonist (and this is the kind of theorist we, following Rolston, are considering), then he will answer by referring to the beneficial effects a disposition to value the fish in this way might have upon an agent. So the desert fish would be seen as valuable, not on account of its objective value, but only insofar as it provides humans like Sarah with an opportunity to 'ennoble' themselves by developing virtuous dispositions - the disposition to value such things as desert fish non-instrumentally, for instance.²⁶

For Rolston this shows that the virtue ethicist is committed to the view that the source of value is not ultimately in whatever being is valued, but in those human subjects who find themselves ennobled by their encounters with it.²⁷ The virtue ethicist, he writes, commits 'the fallacy of misplaced value location',²⁸ locating all the value in the subject, as it were, and none in the world.

We have seen that, if Rolston is correct, (eudaimonist) virtue ethicists are guilty of committing this fallacy even if they accept the possibility of selfless, non-anthropocentric moral motivation, even if, in other words, they perceive such things as desert fish as being of non-instrumental value. And if this is indeed the case then virtue ethics remains human-centred in a

weaker sense of that phrase even if it does not incorporate a self-centred account of moral motivation. It need not be guilty of *anthropocentrism*, but it remains inherently *anthropogenic*.

In order to draw attention to what he sees as the unwelcome implications of this anthropogenism, Rolston asks the reader to consider what an anthropogenic virtue ethical theory implies about the value of a human-free world. If, according to such a theory, things do indeed only have value if there are humans around to be ennobled by valuing them, then, as Rolston puts it, 'Virtue ethics... [understood as a comprehensive account of morality] becomes a light-in-the-refrigerator theory of value', in which value is 'unseen until humans open the door'.²⁹ For Rolston, then, the virtue ethicist, precisely because he remains committed to anthropogenism, is unable to do justice to the value nature has 'in itself', in the absence of humans.

6.

In responding to this claim, I should first say that it is not clear to me that the virtue ethicist must adopt a theory of value according to which things only have value if it proves virtuous for humans to value them.³⁰ However, whatever the truth regarding this matter, a virtue ethicist who *did* subscribe to such a theory would not for that reason be debarred from assigning value to a human-free world.³¹ For such a theorist could maintain that to say that something has value is to say that it *would* be virtuous ('ennobling') to value it. After all, if a disposition to value a certain kind of thing is virtuous, then it is virtuous whether or not any valuers are *actually* present. Perhaps only *potential* valuers are needed. So on this 'dispositional' account, one could say that there would still be values in nature even if humans were wiped from the face of the earth, for even in the absence of humans, it would still be virtuous to value natural things.³²

Rolston does in fact consider this possibility, but he concludes that it still results in a light-in-the-fridge kind of situation. According to a dispositional account of value, he writes, 'actual value is an event in consciousness, though of course natural items while still in the dark

[i.e., unperceived by humans] have potential intrinsic value'.³³ This, however, is an odd charge to make against a dispositional theory, since such a theory is meant to provide an account, not of *potential* value, but of value *simpliciter*. So, to frame the matter in terms of a virtue-based dispositional account, if the desert fish would be perceived by a virtuous agent to have value then, on that account, it has value, not merely potential value, even in the absence of virtuous agents. So on the account we are considering, or indeed any other dispositional account, one does not end up with a light-in-the-fridge situation.

Just as I am not convinced that the virtue ethicist has to endorse the theory of value outlined above, so I am not convinced that virtue ethics must be saddled with a dispositional theory of value.³⁴ Rolston, for his part, would certainly reject any such dispositional theory, not on account of its failing to gel with the central commitments of virtue ethics, but because it is, in his view, inherently at odds with environmental ethics. To be sure, he might concede that such a dispositional account could be nonanthropocentric, in that it need not reckon the value of nonhuman beings by the rule of human desire, but he would, once again, emphasise that in defining value with reference to human beings any such account must remain anthropogenic. The source of value is still in human beings, rather than the world. And that simply isn't good enough. What Rolston wants, what he thinks is *needed* if one is to develop a satisfactory environmental ethic, is an account of what values remain in the absence of any actual or potential human subjects.

But how exactly is one to understand this demand? It is not, I think, simply a call for us to conceive of a world with no humans in it. This, after all, is something we are easily capable of. Indeed, we can conceive of such a world as being populated with all kinds of valuable things, and we are able to do this because we picture ourselves not, to be sure, in the world, but not entirely removed from it either. Instead, we imagine ourselves, so to speak, looking down on the world, as if from God's perspective, and valuing the things we see. But as Berkeley noted, to picture things in this way is still to rely on the presence of at least one valuer, namely oneself, and so such

thoughts may readily be accommodated within a dispositional account of value such as the one presented above.

Rolston, however, would not be satisfied by this response. Instead, he might clarify his demand: What he wants (he might say) is an account of what values would exist in the world, not as it appears from the viewpoint of the subject picturing such a world, but as it would appear independently of human experience. He wants, in other words, to draw our attention to what may be referred to as non-anthropogenic values.

For Rolston, these kinds of value are evident in the descriptions of natural phenomena provided by naturalists, scientists, and other close observers of the natural world. Such observation shows that nature is not evaluatively-neutral. It is shot through with value. Animals value things (food, shelter, warmth, their young, their mates, their prey). Plants, while not conscious, may nonetheless be benefited or harmed. More generally, '[e]very organism has a *good-of-its-kind*; it defends its own kind as a *good kind*'.³⁵ It seems natural to speak in these ways, and in doing so Rolston claims that we are speaking about values.

These claims raise all kinds of interesting philosophical questions - but I will not discuss them here. For one thing, Rolston has, throughout his distinguished career, already covered that terrain, and better than I could manage. For another, I wish to consider a different issue: not whether such values exist, but how, if at all, their existence or non-existence might bear upon our central concern with the possibility of an environmental virtue ethics.

7.

Rolston's general claim, recall, is that the kinds of values one discovers in nature are non-anthropogenic, which is to say that they may be defined without reference to human beings. Now an environmental virtue ethic that bases our moral regard for nature on the presence of such non-anthropogenic values is 'virtue ethical' in name only. On the other hand, any ethic (whether

virtue ethical or not) that fails to take account of such values cannot provide a satisfactory account of our moral relations with the natural world.

I am not convinced, however, that a virtue ethicist (or any other anthropogenic ethicist, for that matter) ought to be perturbed by Rolston's arguments. It is not that his arguments for values in nature are unconvincing.³⁶ The stumbling block for Rolston's argument is that it isn't clear how such values, if they remain entirely removed from human concerns, could bear upon ethics, and so it isn't clear why any ethic that fails to take account of them should be regarded as incomplete.

Consider a tree. Rolston may be right to say that in describing the life of the tree we must describe, not just facts, but values as well. The tree needs certain things (sunlight, etc.), and it is benefited when these are available; it can be harmed; it can flourish or decline - and so forth. Nonetheless, these things granted, it remains an open question how those values - if they may be so described - bear upon our lives. It remains to be shown, in other words, whether those natural values supposedly discovered in the tree should be valued by *us*. As Hargrove writes:

the fact that a particular creature has a good of its own is not enough automatically to produce moral behavior on behalf of the creature. After discovering that something has a good of its own, the human or humans must decide to intrinsically value it...³⁷

Now once one considers the question of how those natural values (the organism's good, or whatever) bear upon what we as humans value, then one is back in anthropogenic territory. And this is territory on which virtue ethicists can have much to say: about the role appreciating the goods of other creatures might play in the living of a fulfilling life; about how the exemplary individual would respond to such values; about the character traits brought into play in responding appropriately to them - and so on.

So humans may respond to the natural values Rolston identifies – it may even be virtuous for them to do so. But when they respond to these values they are only doing so because they bear upon their lives, because, so to speak, they disclose themselves as *valuable*. The life of the tree may indeed be infused by value. But if that value remains completely independent of our lives, if it remains what Keewok Lee has called ‘mutely enacted’ value, it will mean nothing to us.³⁸ The notion of non-anthropogenic value is, to ethics, nothing more an idle wheel.

In the first sections of this paper, I argued that although the ‘entry point for ethical reflection’ for virtue ethics is the agent’s reflection on her life as a whole, that self-centredness, if it may be so described, is merely formal, entailing no substantive conclusions about the place of other-regarding concerns in the good life.³⁹ My response here has a similar form. Virtue ethics is indeed anthropogenic – it cannot take account of ‘mutely enacted’ value. That, however, is no failing. For it is not clear what role non-anthropogenic ‘values’ could play in an ethic, and so it is not clear why any ethic that fails to take account of them ought, for that reason, to be criticised. Virtue ethics is indeed human-centred in this sense; however, since it is not clear how an ethic could be anything else, that human-centredness is, once again, merely formal, entailing no substantive conclusions regarding our relations to the nonhuman world. Just as virtue ethics need not be egoistic, so it need not be human-centred in any sense that ought to perturb environmental thinkers.

8.

According to the subtitle of Rolston’s recent paper on the topic, environmental virtue ethics is ‘Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole’. It is true that valuing the natural world tends to make us better people. But it would, he contends, be dangerous for us to focus exclusively on our self-development and so to forget those values that exist beyond the compass of our human-centred concerns.

I have argued that, given a realistic conception of what self-development involves, one that acknowledges the key role of other-regarding concerns in the good life, this danger is illusory. But it remains to be shown whether virtue ethics could be anything more than half the truth, whether, in other words, a satisfactory environmental ethic could be built solely from aretaic components. To be sure, I have rejected Rolston's demand that a satisfactory environmental ethic must incorporate some account of non-anthropogenic value. But it is unclear to me whether such an ethic would have to incorporate some conception of non-aretaic (yet still anthropogenic) value.

Perhaps we will find that a satisfactory environmental ethic will have to incorporate non-aretaic components. Perhaps, in other words, we will find that virtue ethics does not provide the whole truth in this sense, at least in the sphere of environmental ethics. However, even if this were to prove the case, one would not be justified, on these grounds, in concluding that the project of 'environmental virtue ethics' had reached the end of its road. This conclusion would only be justified if there were good reasons to think that the ideal of a single, comprehensive environmental ethic, whether based on aretaic concepts or not, is an ideal environmental ethicists should strive for. If moral pluralism is the best option, then virtue ethicists ought not to be condemned on account of their inability to deliver the whole truth.⁴⁰ They ought to be praised for having delivered half.

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Notes

¹ On the difficulties of succinctly defining virtue ethics, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.1ff.

² See, e.g., Phillip Cafaro (ed.) *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8, no.2 (2001); Ronald Sandler and Phillip Cafaro (eds.) *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

³ In Dale Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.190. In Elliot's defence, much of the most compelling work on environmental virtue ethics is of very recent origin. For more of Elliot's criticisms of 'environmental virtue ethics' see *Faking Nature: The Ethics of Environmental Restoration* (London: Routledge, 1997). Ronald Sandler defends 'environmental virtue ethics' from several charges, including the objection that it does not provide sufficient guidance for actions ('Towards an Adequate Environmental Virtue Ethic', *Environmental Values* 13, No.4 (2004): 477-95.

⁴ E.g., *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), and most recently, 'Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole' in Sandler and Cafaro (eds.) *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, pp.61-78.

⁵ 'Environmental Virtue Ethics', p.69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁷ For a recent case to this effect, see Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapter 8. For some responses, see Julia Annas, 'Virtue Ethics and Egoism' *A Priori*, Vol.2, (2003): 19-31.

⁸ For a modern statement of such a view, see Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p.167. For the purposes of this article, I take the expressions 'a good life', 'flourishing' and 'living well' to be synonymous. For some of the complexities surrounding these notions see Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, pp.9-10 and Chapter 8, and Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 3.

⁹ Which is not to say that all virtue ethics are eudaimonistic. Michael Slote, for instance, has rejected the idea that an account of the virtues must be allied to some substantive conception of human well-being.

(‘Agent-Based Virtue Ethics’, in Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (eds.), *Moral Concepts: Midwest Studies of Philosophy* 20 (1996), pp.83-101.

¹⁰ Note the qualifications. Although it is the case that if a theory is self-centred in this sense it must be ‘human-centred’, it is not clear to me that a satisfactory environmental ethic cannot be ‘human-centred’.

For further discussion of this issue, see Bernard Williams, ‘Must a Concern for the Environment be Centred on Human Beings?’ in C.C.W. Taylor (ed.), *Ethics and the Environment* (Didcot: Bocardo Press, 1992), pp.60-8; in relation to virtue ethics, see Thomas Hill, Jr. ‘Comments on Frasz and Cafaro on Environmental Virtue Ethics’, in Cafaro (ed.) ‘Environmental Virtue Ethics’, pp.61-62.

¹¹ Rolston, ‘Environmental Virtue Ethics’, p.70.

¹² Buddhism, for example. There are good reasons for thinking that Buddhist ethics might best be framed as kinds of eudaimonism. Yet this does not conflict with the central Buddhist commitment to undercutting any kind of self-centred desire – even a desire to become enlightened. See David E. Cooper and Simon P. James, *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

¹³ See Gary Watson, ‘On the Primacy of Character’, in Daniel Statman (ed.), *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp.56-81, at 64-65.

¹⁴ Cf. Annas, ‘Virtue Ethics and Egoism’, p.30, n.13.

¹⁵ Note the qualifier. Individual benevolent *actions* need not always redound to the benefit of the agent. Acting benevolently may, on occasion, harm the agent. Moreover, for some forms of eudaimonism, even the possession of virtue does not guarantee well-being. See Aristotle’s discussion of the way in which the life of a virtuous person (Priam, in his example) may be ‘marred’ (if not ‘ruined’) (NE 1101a5-14). See further, Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p.75, n.11.

¹⁶ Whether she may be *partly* motivated by self-interest is another question. Kelly Rogers has argued that it would be a mistake to assume that other-regarding action must be entirely purged of self-interest. See ‘Beyond Self and Other’, in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul (eds.), *Self-Interest* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.1-20, (pp.12-13).

¹⁷ ‘Environmental Virtue Ethics’, p.70. Cf. p.73.

¹⁸ *Environmental Ethics*, p.118.

¹⁹ ‘Environmental Virtue Ethics’, p.70.

²⁰ Moreover, it is possible that both might agree that, from Sarah's viewpoint, the fish seems to have objective value. Indeed, there is an argument for saying that it is a condition of valuing that value appears to be intrinsic to the object, independent of our perception of it. After all, one cannot value an object and at the same time conceive that value as something that does not inhere in the object but is instead conferred upon it by one's very act of valuing.

²¹ On this distinction, see J. Baird Callicott, 'On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species', in Bryan G. Norton (ed.), *The Preservation of Species* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.142.

²² I.e., values that are, as John O'Neill puts it, strongly objective. See his essay, 'The Varieties of Intrinsic Value', in Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (eds.), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp.131-142, at p.135ff.

²³ As Robert L. Chapman notes ((2002) 'The Goat-stag and the Sphinx: The *Place* of the Virtues in Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Values* 11 (2): 129-44, at 135-6).

²⁴ 'Environmental Virtue Ethics', p.70.

²⁵ Rolston himself does not distinguish these two readings. In the following I will therefore be presenting an argument which is only implicit in Rolston's work.

²⁶ I am not sure whether this second reading shows that virtue ethics must be self-centred regardless of what it implies about the motivation of agents. Recall Rolston's original claim: that 'The wild other does not become valuable if and when it results in something valuable for me...' What is his target? One option would be that he is attacking the notion that the wild other becomes valuable if and when it results in something valuable for the agent (i.e., Sarah), however she is motivated. But if valuing the fish for what it is in itself is virtuous, it is not virtuous because of how it bears upon the well-being of any *particular* agent. It is virtuous because of some (internal) relation it bears to human nature generally. For this reason, the line of reasoning we have been considering does not prove that virtue ethics must be self-centred, though, as we shall see, it does show that it must be in a sense human-centred.

²⁷ The thought here is that value can either be in the mind of the valuer or in the object apprehended. But this dichotomy implies an implausible theory of perception, and one to which the virtue ethicist need not be committed. In the light of an alternative – and to my mind, more realistic – account of perception, one that refused to countenance such a dualistic conception of subject and object, Rolston's charge would not get

off the ground. In this regard, it would be interesting to consider how Rolston's account would appear in the light of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. See his *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁸ Rolston's reference to the 'location' of values is potentially misleading. We have supposed that all parties to the debate agree where the value is *located* (i.e., 'in' the fish). However, they disagree in their accounts of the *source* of that value (in Rolston's view, the virtue ethicist thinks the value has its source in human subjects when it actually has its source in the fish itself).

²⁹ 'Environmental Virtue Ethics', p.76.

³⁰ See n.27. Moreover, as Chapman notes, 'Value assignments are not a fundamental concern for virtue ethics' ('The Goat-stag and the Sphinx', p.135).

³¹ As John O'Neill puts it, more generally, '[t]hat humans are the source of value is not incompatible with their assigning value to a world in which they do not exist' 'The Varieties of Intrinsic Value', p.133.

³² Cf. Christopher Belshaw's dispositional account of value – *Environmental Philosophy: Reason, Nature and Human Concern* (Chesham: Acumen, 2001), pp.225-7.

³³ *Environmental Ethics*, p.116. Cf. Holmes Rolston III, 'Value in Nature and the Nature of Value', in Light and Rolston (eds.), *Environmental Ethics*, pp.143-153, at p.144. Compare Rolston's claim that, according to virtue ethics, value might be 'there in the dark [with the fridge door closed, as it were] but it is unseen until humans open the door' ('Environmental Virtue Ethics', p.76).

³⁴ See n.27, n.30.

³⁵ Rolston, 'Value in Nature and the Nature of Value', p.145.

³⁶ Rolston is, in my view, correct in arguing that, *pace* scientific naturalism, our perception of the world, the natural world included, is shot through with normativity, with value. Yet I suspect that that normativity is better thought of along phenomenological lines, as a feature of one's pre-reflective experience, rather than as a component of a supposedly objective world.

³⁷ Hargrove, 'Weak Anthropocentric Value', p.180. Cf. Belshaw, *Environmental Philosophy*, pp.211-212. Though Hargrove refers to 'creatures', his point applies to organisms generally. Cf. O'Neill, 'The Varieties of Intrinsic Value', p.138.

³⁸ Keewok Lee, 'The Source and Locus of Intrinsic Value: A Reexamination', in Light and Holmes (eds.), *Environmental Ethics*, pp.154-162, at 158-160.

³⁹ The quotation is from Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.11.

⁴⁰ On the question of pluralism in environmental ethics, see Light, Andrew and Rolston, Holmes, III (eds.), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), Part IV.