Preface

Many environmentalists say that unless we change the way we live, we will destroy both the world we live in and ultimately ourselves. Fundamental changes are required in our understanding both of ourselves and of the natural world. Environmental thinkers have also argued that the sources of environmental crisis lie deep in the origins of Western civilization, in our most fundamental understanding of what it is to be human and to live an appropriately human life, and in our conception of the natural world. If this is true, then in addition to deciding how to regulate our industry—controlling pollution, economizing on resource use, developing sustainable agriculture, etc.—we face problems that call for a fundamental moral reorientation.

In all religious and philosophical traditions, one's sense of moral obligation—be it to other human beings, to animals, or to nature—always involves a specific understanding of both the moral self and the other to whom the self relates in moral action. All the major ethical theories in the Western philosophical tradition—from Socrates and Plato, through Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontology, to utilitarianism—have disagreed about two related ideas: what it means to be human and what it means to relate morally to an other. However, all of these traditions have shared the basic assumption that the morally significant other is human: family, friends, fellow citizens, or fellow human beings. This is true even when these moral relationships are established or supported by God. Given this tradition, any deep shift in our relationship to nature will require a new understanding of what it means for human beings to relate to the natural world and to live a moral life as part of that world.

TRADITIONAL ANTHROPOCENTRISM

In most of the Western religious and philosophical tradition, the nonhuman world is thought to exist for the sake of human beings. This metaphysical and ethical position has come to be known as *anthropocentrism*.[1] It is based on religious doctrine, on philosophical argument, and on scientific theory.

The assumed superiority of human beings over the rest of the world has religious expression in the first account of creation in *Genesis*. God commands human beings, who have the unique status of being created in the image of God, to "be masters of . . . all the wild beasts" (*Genesis* 1:26) and to "fill the earth and conquer it" (*Genesis* 1:28).[2] Independently of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, there are statements of anthropocentrism in the Western philosophical tradition beginning with the ancient Greeks. Xenophon formulated the classic position in his dialogue, *Memorabilia,* in which his "Socrates" says,

> *Tell me, Euthydemus, has it ever occurred to you to reflect on the care the gods have taken to furnish man with what he needs? . . . Now, seeing that we need food, think how they make the earth to yield it, and provide to that end appropriate seasons which furnish in abundance the diverse things that minister not only to our wants but to our enjoyment . . . and is it not evident that they [the lower animals] too receive life and food for the sake of man?* (Xenophon, Book IV, Chapter III, 3, 5, 10).

The general point is that the structure of the cosmos shows that it is the result of design, and more specifically that it is designed for the sake of human beings.[3] Human beings have needs and the nonhuman world exists to satisfy these needs.

There are classic statements of anthropocentrism in Aristotle, in Aquinas—who with typical exhaustiveness offers some seven arguments in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Aquinas, 115–119)—in Immanuel Kant, and in the works of many other philosophers. Kant's position is typical: "Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man. We can ask, 'Why do animals exist?' But to ask, 'Why does man exist?' is a meaningless question" (Kant, 1775–1780, 239; cf. Part I below). The otherness of animals, their very existence and their difference from human beings, is explained and understood in terms of this relation to human needs.

CRITIQUES OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM

In light of the history of environmental destruction and the heedless treatment of animals that is the Western legacy, especially since the advent of scientifically-based technology and industry, it is hardly surprising to see the appearance of fundamental critiques of the entire anthropocentric tradition. Some forms of this critique are focused on sentient animals, and these theories typically involve *extending* to animals the moral consideration that has traditionally been restricted to human beings. I discuss these approaches, animal rights and animal liberation theory (the latter two titles point to important philosophical differences), in Part I.

Other critics of anthropocentrism, instead of extending to the higher animals the moral consideration traditionally granted to human beings, develop ethical theories that are not dependent on traditional ethics. Such positions are *bio*centric—*life*-centered—in contrast to traditional *anthropo*centric—*human*-centered—positions. The first great pioneer of biocentric thought in twentieth-century Western philosophy was Albert Schweitzer, who developed his principle of "reverence for life" as a revolutionary answer to what he saw as the crisis of Western civilization. Schweitzer's ethical focus is not merely on human beings and animals, but on the world of life in its full breadth, which ultimately encompasses everything in our world (cf. Part II).

Biocentrism has deeper historical roots in American thought. In the mid-nineteenth century, American thinking about nature placed specific emphasis on the value of wildness and on the proper place of human beings in both nature and culture. In his essay "Walking" (1862), Henry David Thoreau protests against the destruction of wildness and insists that we will live better, more satisfying lives if we consider ourselves to be "an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature" (Thoreau, 659), living "a sort of border life" between civil society and the wild (*Ibid*, 683). The wildness that Thoreau felt to be an essential aspect of authentic human selfhood required a new and different relationship to the wildness of nature, which Thoreau no longer regarded as something to be domesticated for the material benefit of domesticated human beings.

In *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), Aldo Leopold demands that we understand ourselves as "plain member and citizen" of the land community rather than as its "conqueror" (Leopold, 204). The task,

as Leopold sees it, is to reframe our relationship to the natural world completely, to cease to see the natural world merely as raw material for whatever projects we think will enrich us, because we, like all living organisms, must live not only from the world of which we are a part, but also in the world. Above and beyond the instrumental value that nature can and does have for us, the biotic world has an inherent value in and of itself.

Such recognition requires a corresponding change in our understanding of ourselves. A new "You must change the way you live" confronts us, according to Thoreau and Leopold. This time the admonition does not come from the torso of Apollo—the idealized human body—that challenged the poet Rainer Maria Rilke to a higher, more truly poetic form of living (Rilke, 313/189). This time the challenge comes from a new recognition of the dignity of the natural world that our culture seems so bent on destroying. Such recognition changes our understanding of ourselves and of what it means to live a truly fulfilling and moral human life. Relating to wildness outside us, we cultivate the wildness within ourselves. The two sides condition one another reciprocally: a changed understanding of the meaning of the natural world brings about a changed understanding of ourselves, and vice versa.

CONTEMPORARY BIOCENTRIC EGALITARIANISM

Since the field of environmental ethics has been established as a recognized subdiscipline of philosophy over the past thirty years, the critique of traditional anthropocentrism has sharpened. Thoreau understood hunting and fishing to be expressions of human wildness and as conducive to an individual's development, even though he was drawn to the idea that vegetarianism is conducive to a higher spirituality.[4] Leopold was a passionate hunter. However, many contemporary philosophers have argued that the approval of hunting and fishing in Thoreau and Leopold is a residue of the anthropocentric attitude of domination each struggled so hard to overcome. The result of a radical critique of the presumption of human superiority has come in the form of *biocentric egalitarianism*. From this standpoint, hunting and fishing are viewed as expressions of the traditional assumption of human superiority over nature, and are therefore considered immoral. More generally, for biocentric egalitarians, any

human actions that unnecessarily—in a very tough sense—harm nonhuman life are forbidden; it is morally impermissible for human beings to use nonhuman nature without some kind of overriding justification. This often takes the form of claims that we have a duty to protect and enhance the well-being of wild living things (Albert Schweitzer and Paul Taylor; cf. Parts II and III below) or that we are obligated to leave them alone to the greatest extent possible (Tom Regan, James Sterba, among others; cf. Part I below). Recognition of the inherent value of nonhuman life leads to recognition of an obligation not to harm such life.

THE FALLACY OF CONTEMPORARY BIOCENTRIC EGALITARIANISM

Such lines of thinking can seem very appealing as an antidote to the destructiveness, thoughtlessness, and general lack of concern for the natural world in our culture and its economy. But we must be careful about the way in which the idea of biocentric egalitarianism is developed. I argue that in a justified reaction against traditional anthropocentrism, much recent biocentric egalitarian thought has simply gone to the other extreme. Rejecting the idea that the natural world exists as a pure resource for human use, many argue that human beings are obligated, to the greatest extent possible, to refrain from using nature as a resource at all. The result is a curious mirror image[5] of anthropocentrism, as human beings are once again removed from nature. But this time the removal goes in the opposite direction from that taken by anthropocentrism. Instead of the removal making us lords of a nature that exists for our use, this new removal involves the moral obligation to take ourselves out of participation in natural processes to the greatest extent possible—out of respect for nature.

Of course this demand cannot be met completely, as many of these thinkers acknowledge. But the belief that this is the ideal toward which we should strive is widespread. Here are some examples:

1. Albert Schweitzer's principle of reverence for life requires that we "have the will to maintain our own life and every kind of existence that we can in any way influence, and to bring them to their highest value" (Schweitzer 1923, 278). Schweitzer recognizes that in this world, life lives at the expense of life, and

that necessity compels us to harm and destroy other living things so that we can live. But when we do so, Schweitzer insists, something evil occurs, and we incur guilt (cf. Part II below).

2. In their discussion of Arne Naess's philosophy of deep ecology, Bill Devall and George Sessions write, "Naess suggests that biocentric equality as an intuition is *true in principle*, *although* in the process of living, all species use each other as food, shelter, etc." (Devall and Sessions, 67; my emphasis). The clear suggestion here is that the recognition of a biocentric equality that would grant everything an equal right to its full self-realization, while a worthwhile ideal, conflicts with the reality that life lives from life. (It is not clear that Naess would agree with Devall and Sessions's interpretation.)
3. Paul Taylor, from the perspective of his principle of respect for nature, notes with regret that "Although we cannot avoid some disruption of the natural world when we pursue our cultural and individual values, [if we cultivate the attitude of respect for nature] we nevertheless constantly place constraints on ourselves so as to cause the least possible interference in natural ecosystems and their biota" (Taylor 1986, 310; cf. Part III below).
4. James Sterba writes, "As a moral agent, one's general obligation to all living beings is simply not to interfere with them" (Sterba 1998, 374).
5. Finally, even Aldo Leopold—for whom being a "plain member and citizen" of the land community is precisely to be a part, a *responsible* part, of the food chain, where good citizenship involves living in such a way that the flow of energy in the system is not impeded even as we take our biologically natural place within the system—slips into formulations that suggest that our status as *user* of nature as a resource is a regrettable fact. "A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state" (Leopold, 204). Once again, the suggestion seems to be that the ideal would be total disengagement, but since this is impossible, we have to make do with a less radical disengagement.

I argue that something has gone deeply wrong here. The fundamental mistake common to all these thinkers is the assumption that there is a deep opposition between respect for the inherent value of living beings on the one hand and instrumental use of them on the other. If one makes this assumption, then it is not only natural but also inescapable to conclude that instrumental use of beings of inherent worth is *prima facie* a violation of that worth, *prima facie* a failure to respect.[6] For such a view, instrumental use may be justified in certain circumstances when the *prima facie* duty not to use is overridden by necessity, but the basic imperative against use remains as an ideal.

I argue—most formally in Part III, Chapter 2—that this assumption is based on the reduction of living things, human and nonhuman, to abstractions, all under the guise of assuming the moral point of view. When we think concretely, no living thing can be considered adequately in isolation from its place in a web of life in which everything lives by appropriating from the surrounding world the energy and nutrition it needs. The inherent worth of any living thing is inextricably bound up with the instrumental value of the energy and nutrition it appropriates from its environment, often enough from other living things; inherent value and instrumental value are intertwined with one another. To respect the inherent value of one being requires respect for its instrumental use of and to other beings. Put in Paul Taylor's terms, I show that there is no inherent worth (a being that has or pursues its own good) without instrumental value (that which is appropriated when such a being pursues its own good). This is not changed when that which is appropriated itself has inherent worth. Both instrumental value and instrumental use are thus constitutive moments of inherent value.

Human beings are no exception to this law of organic life and its value. The moral agent is not a disinterested spectator of the world of organic life, but an engaged participant in transfers of energy and nutrition—transfers of life itself—in the real world. Our being as organic forms of life requires that we participate in food chains; our being as moral agents requires that we ask *how* we can participate with respect for both those chains and the individuals that make them up—including ourselves. This is a dimension of human existence that has been neglected by most philosophers (Albert Schweitzer is a notable exception), since from an anthropocentric position this dimension raises few interesting issues. For traditional philosophy, the fact that human beings are organic forms of life is of importance chiefly

because this is the cause of human mortality and suffering and a hindrance to the exercise of human rationality and freedom.

To call for the removal of human beings as participants in the natural order, even as an ideal, fails to respect both the inherent value of human beings as forms of organic life and the dignity of human appropriation. It is to sacrifice respect for our own organic being on the altar of moral principle. But I argue that moral obligation involves no such sacrifice, not even as an ideal. To recognize and respect the inherent worth of something does not commit one to the *prima facie* obligation to leave it alone, to refrain from making use of it or consuming it. The goal is rather to determine what constitutes the *morally respectful use and appropriation of* the natural world and of the beings of inherent worth with which we share that world. To consider how the lives of animals can be appropriated with respect, one must begin by recognizing the way in which the life of each living being is intertwined with the lives of other living beings. By the same token, one must begin with human beings who are integral parts of the organic web of life.

Two extremes must be avoided:

1. the unlimited appropriation and domination sanctioned by traditional anthropocentrism;
2. the ideal of zero human participation in and appropriation of the natural world demanded by biocentric egalitarians.

I discuss in some detail the views of several philosophers who have come to this kind of "egalitarian" conclusion: the animal rights theory of Tom Regan (Part I), Albert Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life (Part II), and Paul Taylor's ethics of respect for nature (Part III).

PRIMARY APPROPRIATION: HUNTING AND FISHING AS A TEST CASE

For animal rights and current biocentric egalitarian approaches, nonsubsistence, "sport" hunting and fishing are the easy cases: given these ethical principles, any hunting that is not strictly subsistence hunting, for which there are no practical alternatives, is quickly seen as immoral. In contrast, an approach that emphasizes our respectful participation in

food chains may come to very different conclusions about certain forms of hunting and fishing. For this reason, my concrete test case in discussing the theories of Regan, Schweitzer, and Taylor is contemporary nonsubsistence hunting.

By the same token, the contemporary practice of catch and release fishing hardly merits any discussion if a conventionally biocentric egalitarian concept of "respect for nature" is simply presupposed—it is just obviously wrong (cf., e.g., de Leeuw, who accepts this presupposition without any argument). For this reason, I take up the issue of catch and release fishing in Part V.

By taking as my test case what biocentric egalitarians consider to be easy cases, I pose a challenge, especially to Schweitzer and Taylor. I argue that hunting illustrates most clearly the positive value and meaning of human participation in natural processes in which life and death, self and other, are intertwined. The truly difficult and deadly serious issue is not hunting and fishing, but the relationship of a technologically advanced civilization to the natural world.

Hunting and catch and release fishing present something of a continuum. Beginning with subsistence hunting and fishing, in which the prey is required for sustenance, through "sport" hunting and fishing (including the eating of the prey), to catch and release fishing, in which the prey is released "unharmed" and which involves no biological appropriation, the continuum extends from necessary participation in the food chain, through ritualized and symbolic participation, to a practice that has no ties to the food chain. As Holmes Rolston III writes, "We move from eating—a primordial necessity—to play, seemingly trivial. Can we use these two activities to help us figure out who we are & where we are & what we ought to do?"[7]

I call hunting, killing, and eating a wild animal, even when it is not required for subsistence, the "primary appropriation" of animal life. In this series of actions our inescapable dependence on animal life is encountered in as direct a manner as possible. This dependence is inescapable, since even vegetarians and vegans engage in what I call "secondary appropriation," for all human actions have an unavoidable impact on animal life. Every time a field is cleared to grow organic vegetables, habitat for wild animals is destroyed. If there is an intrinsically moral dimension to our relations with wild animals, we cannot avoid the fact of universal human appropriation. I examine the moral questions raised by the practice of hunting in order to

confront in as direct a manner as possible the moral dimensions of our dependence on nonhuman nature.

STRATEGIES FOR READING: ADVICE FOR NONPHILOSOPHERS

This book is a contribution to the field of environmental ethics, but it is written with the aim of reaching a much broader audience of interested nonspecialists. Specifically, reflective hunters and anglers should find the book to be interesting and rewarding. At the same time, some of the book contains fairly technical philosophical discussions, and a reader who does not want to tackle these sections right off the bat can easily avoid them and come back to them later.

A reader who is specifically interested in hunting and angling could go directly to Part IV, Chapter 2 and Part V. However, it would be more rewarding to take the following path through the book. Begin with Part I followed by the Appendix. These discussions are nontechnical, but give the reader a sense of what the more technical sections in Parts II and III are about. The next step would be to read the last section in Part II, Chapter 1, "Hunting and Reverence for Life," and the last section in Part II, Chapter 2, "Questions About Hunting." The reader will then be in a good position to read Parts IV and V.

AN OVERVIEW

In Parts I–III, a presentation or interpretation of the position under discussion is followed by a critique of that position. In each case, the critique is followed by a discussion of alternative approaches to understanding the moral status of hunting in the contemporary world, and these discussions of hunting make essential use of literature on hunting. My approach in these sections is broadly phenomenological, using hunting literature as a source of exemplary experiences and reflections on those experiences. My task is to analyze these experiences and reflections, looking for the essential structures and meanings that can be found in them or teased out of them. In Part IV I try to draw the various threads from the first three sections together. Finally, while catch and release fishing is not primary appropriation—and is often

considered to be morally superior to "meat" fishing for that reason—this widespread practice raises moral issues, especially that of cruelty, which must be dealt with on their own terms. In Part V I use the results of Part IV to investigate these issues. The Appendix offers a critical study of Matthew Scully's important book *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*. It is included here because Scully's book is an excellent and important contribution to the political discussion of an important, if generally invisible, issue. My critique of Scully's philosophical underpinnings is a nontechnical version of my critiques of Schweitzer and Taylor in Parts II and III.