

***'Human-centered ethical frameworks cannot adequately deal with the moral issues involving other species, ecosystems, the land, atmosphere and oceans, since there are values in nature that are independent of human interests and rights.'* (Naess 1989). Using an ethical theory (or set of principles), discuss whether or not we should agree with this statement. In your response, focus on one moral issue relevant to science, or one set of moral issues relevant to science, using a specific example.**

Utilitarianism and Nature

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In this essay I will outline utilitarianism and explain it using an example from science. I will then use the example to analyse the argument put forward by Naess that human-centred ethical frameworks cannot deal with moral issues of nature that are independent of human interests and rights. I arrive at the conclusion that utilitarianism as a human-centred ethical framework can adequately deal with moral issues in nature.

Utilitarianism is the ethical framework by which we focus on the utility or happiness created by our actions as a basis for determining whether those actions are morally right or wrong. Land, the atmosphere, the oceans and ecosystems have only *extrinsic value*. This means that they are valuable only due to their relationship to something of intrinsic value. This is in direct contrast to, for example, happiness, which the utilitarian believes have an *intrinsic value* - it is valuable even in isolation.

To see how utilitarianism works, let's take the following example. Imagine we wish to test the effects on humans of radiation therapy for medical applications. In order to do this, we must take a number of subjects and perform a particular treatment on them, monitoring the effects of such treatment. While there is a risk of cancer involved for the subjects, therefore generating negative utility, a utilitarian may justify such an experiment if they predict that the benefits for future patients, derived from the research, resulting in positive utility, will outweigh the negative utility of the cancer risk, resulting in a net positive. This action could be described as being for the greater good. It would seem an issue arises for Naess when we realise we could substitute human test subjects with animal test subjects.

In dealing with the natural world, it is important that we focus solely on the consequences of our actions. The best way of doing this would be to take a utilitarian approach and apply it to all living species using a score system which includes parameters such as ability to understand utility and ability to create utility. Due to the superior cognitive ability of humans which allows them to understand utility, as well as their communication skills and opposable thumbs which allow them to manipulate the world in ways to create utility, they will be given the highest priority. Using this system we could make decisions such as which species we should use for our radiation therapy treatment and how many subjects we should use. If at some point there is a method devised by which utility or happiness can be accurately and objectively quantified for different actions (or we at least come to a general agreement on an exact definition for utility or happiness), we may be able to feed this quantified data to an AI system which can return answers to us for which decisions are of greatest net utility for all

animals involved, human or otherwise. The utility involved with each action will be scaled by factors that account for the priority score of each species involved. By applying this system to all living species, we take into consideration the moral issues of those species while keeping it human-centred, as is required to argue Naess's claim.

This deals with Naess's claim that human-centred framework 'cannot adequately deal with the moral issues involving other species, ecosystems', however, it does not address his concern regarding the atmosphere, land and oceans. I reject the premise that there exist moral issues involving those listed which are independent of human interests or rights. The atmosphere, land and oceans have extrinsic value which lies in the utility that they provide to those who experience it - humans and other species. As a result, it is not possible for issues to be considered moral in the absence of humans and other species. Atmosphere, land and oceans are all means by which utility can be generated. We should not protect nature just for the sake of it being nature. We should protect it because it keeps us safe and happy.

Now that we have analysed Naess's claim, that human-centred ethical frameworks cannot deal with values of nature that are independent of human interests and rights, we can conclude that utilitarianism can in fact serve as a guide for any moral issues in nature.

Bibliography

Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy. (n.d.). Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value. In *plato.stanford.edu*. Retrieved January 13, 2020, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-intrinsic-extrinsic/#Bib>

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