CHAPTER 2

GLOBAL ETHICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

Without some kind of ethic (a theory of right and responsibility) and some kind of axiology (or value-theory), we lack guidance and direction for tackling problems, whether global, environmental or otherwise. What is more, we even lack a satisfactory basis for identifying problems in the first place. In this chapter some alternative understandings of ethics and of value-theory will be considered, and a substantive ethical stance will be presented and defended.

One basic issue in value-theory concerns the range of things that matter. In this connection there is a strong case for revising the traditional view that only human beings and their values and interests matter, or traditional anthropocentrism. For it is difficult to credit that nothing but our own species matters, morally speaking, just as it is difficult to credit that what matters is just our own family and friends, or just our own country, and nothing else besides. The same difficulties confront the variety of anthropocentrism which holds that absolutely everything exists for the sake of humanity, and for it alone (metaphysical anthropocentrism); as the philosopher Descartes pointed out, the view that all the galaxies exist simply for our sake is ridiculous.[1]

The alternatives to anthropocentrism include sentientism, which accords moral recognition to all creatures with feelings, and thus capable of pleasure and suffering, and only to such creatures; biocentrism, which recognises the moral standing of all living creatures; and ecocentrism, which regards ecosystems and the biosphere as having moral significance independent of that of their members. Abandoning anthropocentrism is likely to involve moving in one of these directions. True, there is also a case for remaining anthropocentrist, if what is meant by this is that we cannot help making all our valuations with human faculties and from a human perspective;

but this entirely sensible and harmless 'perspectival anthropocentrism' (as Frederick Ferré calls it)[2] is far removed from traditional anthropocentrism (the position just mentioned), and gives it no shred of support. On the contrary, people who recognise simply that animal suffering matters independently of human interests are already committed to discarding that kind of anthropocentrism.

A CHALLENGE TO THEORIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

But before considering what kind of stance should be adopted instead, we should reflect on Tim Ingold's challenge to all these 'centrisms'. All of them, he suggests (including even centrisms which do not make humanity central), distort our relation to the environment, establishing a boundary between humanity and nature. All of them thus ignore our pre-ethical engagement (or commitment) to our environments, and proceed as if we were detached observers, located outside the environment (whether understood as laboratory, mine or sanctuary), and as if we were capable of standing back from our unavoidable involvement with a whole network of relationships both with human beings and with non-human components of the environment. He suggests that it is from such relationships that any ethical system grows. Our own (equally unavoidable) part in these relationships consists in 'the kind of sensitivity and responsiveness which is the natural counterpart of [this] close and intimate involvement'; and for this pre-ethical stance, ethical codes are no substitute.[3]

Ingold does well to remind us that people have commitments before they begin thinking about ethics; as he implies, most people already have a range of related motivations by this stage (and far from merely egoistic ones at that), and hence such motivations do not have to be charmed into precarious existence out of an apathetic void. Yet to characterise people's pre-ethical commitments in ethical terms such as 'sensitivity' and 'responsiveness' imports far too much specific content into the diverse range of people's actual feelings about their environments. Moderately insensitive people can still have some kind of engagement with their native or adoptive environment, and of course have their responsibilities every bit as much as sensitive ones; while the sensitivities of quite sensitive people often turn out on reflection to be misinformed or misdirected, involving, for instance, an exaggerated or aggressive local patriotism. Pre-ethical engagements are no substitute for ethics.

These reflections have a bearing on the suggestion that recognition

of pre-ethical commitments undermines ethical debate, such as the debate between anthropocentrism, ecocentrism and biocentrism, or shows it to be grounded in a confusion. For while pre-ethical commitments may make ethical commitments more feasible, they have not reached the stage of being ethical commitments, and they do not even begin to supersede the importance of ethical reflection. Most people would agree that we need to reflect on future generations, and on issues such as how like or unlike ourselves they may be expected to be, if we are to discover what sensitive individuals or agencies should do in their regard. In just the same way, we need to reflect on distant peoples, and also on non-human species, before we can get them too into ethical perspective. Ethical reflection can appeal to and take account of widespread intuitive judgements, for example about the significance of animal suffering (as mentioned above), and thus need not operate as if human beings led lives detached from one another and from their environment; but it is far from exhausted by this appeal, and we should be immensely impoverished if it were so.

COSMOPOLITANISM AND COMMUNITARIANISM

In this book (and the other works in this series), a universalist ethical stance known as 'cosmopolitanism' is defended. Like the other authors in the series, I maintain that ethical responsibilities apply everywhere and to all moral agents capable of shouldering them, and not only to members of one or another tradition or community; and that factors which provide reasons for action for any agent, whether individual or corporate, provide reasons for like action for any other agent who is similarly placed, whatever their community may be or believe. The stance of cosmopolitanism is sometimes thought to disregard the networks of relationships in which moral agents find themselves; and these communities or networks are sometimes considered to generate limits to ethical norms and principles, as well as to motivation for compliance with them. Based as it is on community boundaries, this position is known as communitarianism, a stance opposed to cosmopolitanism. (Incidentally, cosmopolitanism and communitarianism are each consistent with anthropocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism alike, except where communitarians claim to have found ethical boundaries relevant to the scope of morality. So the different debates between them can be treated separately, up to the point where they are shown to intersect.)

Communitarianism begins with a creditable belief in the value of community, and with the defensible premise that moralities mostly

arise from, and are learned within, communities. Sometimes it simply comprises 'a form of social criticism that is aimed at the disappearance of community in modern society'.[4] But it usually proceeds to the dubious conclusions that all moral rights and obligations depend on relationships, and that where there are no ties of community there are no moral obligations, nor moral motivations either. Sometimes it is held, partly for these reasons, that whatever is locally accepted is right, and should be recognised as such. Some communitarians even hold that external appraisals of the morality of a national, ethnic or local community make no sense, since meaningful discourse itself depends on shared community membership.

Cosmopolitans, believing as they do in universal moral responsibilities, can recognise the value of community, the moral inspiration often provided by communities, and the desirability of an upbringing among people of shared values. But they need not accept that agents bereft of relationships (like the protagonist in John Fowles' novel *The Magus*)[5] have no responsibilities. Nor need they hold that we have no responsibilities with regard to people (or other creatures) who themselves lack relationships. More importantly, they need not accept that there are no obligations between communities or across community boundaries. Not even people unaware of having any remaining family or community ties are free to treat others however they please, or to perform random acts of vandalism. Nor, happily, need cosmopolitans (nor the discerning reader) accept that the possibility of moral motivation ceases for those who have no community, let alone *towards* such unfortunates, nor that whatever is locally accepted is thereby invariably right, nor that moral discourse between members of disparate communities need be empty or at cross-purposes, as if travellers or journalists or tourists could never find common moral ground with the people of other cultures that they visit. Sometimes it will be so, but why must it always be so?

Communitarians sometimes accuse their critics of rootlessness. As mentioned in Chapter 1, David Cooper writes of global environmentalists that 'At home everywhere, today's intellectual is at home nowhere in particular. It would be no surprise if his idea of an environment would be The Environment.'[6] Nigel Dower has compared the tone of this remark to Alasdair MacIntyre's criticism of cosmopolitanism 'that in making people citizens of everywhere it makes them rootless citizens of nowhere.'[7] Now the criticisms both of MacIntyre and of Cooper are often on target, in MacIntyre's case exposing the lack of content in certain forms of liberalism, and in Cooper's case, holistic advocacy (for example, on the part of Deep

Ecologists) of a sense of oneness with the natural environment, or the planet as a whole, as if the subject's separate identity could be merged in the environment and discarded thereby.

But these criticisms often take an overgeneralised form. As Brenda Almond has pointed out in reply to MacIntyre, liberalism sometimes constitutes a substantial tradition with values which (she implicitly suggests) world citizens can share;[8] whatever view you take of liberalism, you would be ill-advised to assert that liberalism does not form a tradition, or that it is always neutral about values. Cooper also exaggerates. On the one hand, many people are members of multiple communities, without losing their roots in the community of their birthplace or upbringing; I am fortunate enough to be one of them. On the other hand, refugees and displaced persons often form new and vibrant communities, in the spirit of Aviezer Tucker's remark that 'The natural home of humanity is the dry land of the planet.'[9] Often (come to that), so do groups campaigning for justice for the world's poor, or for wilderness or wildlife preservation; having wide concerns does not make people rootless. 'Cultivating an unreflective familiarity with an environment' (if this really can be cultivated, as Cooper suggests)[10] is not the same as belonging or having roots. In any case, unreflectiveness, as Andrew Belsey remarks, is not a characteristic of human beings or of their relation to their local environment.[11] Nor is an unreflective familiarity necessary for membership in a community. Community membership can often be deliberately acquired or cultivated, occasionally through the foundation of a new community.

So cosmopolitans need not be rootless; and mobility is consistent with belonging to one or more communities and environments, and also with having a sense of responsibility, whether narrow or wide. For a sense of responsibility need not be confined to particular communities and their members, or to particular environments, much as local loyalties and a sense of place can nourish and renew a person's sense of responsibility. Besides, an increasing number of people, particularly those who trade or travel internationally or belong to international bodies (such as churches), are aware of being 'members of the global human community',[12] with its shared problems and possibilities (which are discussed further in Chapter 11). But before cosmopolitanism and the form of it upheld in this book are expounded further, its historical origins and some key stages in its development should be briefly reviewed.

KEY STAGES IN THE HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL ETHICS

The possibility of ethical relations between different human societies has been apparent at least since the time of Augustine (AD 354–430), who in *The City of God* stressed the unity of the human species and also that of God's purposes for humanity.[13] Earlier still, Stoics such as Epictetus (c. AD 55–135) had commended regarding oneself as a citizen of the world, among a person's other roles;[14] but with Augustine some of the ethical implications of intersocietal ethics were elicited, for example in his attempt to distinguish between just and unjust wars. Later, Thomas Aquinas (1224–74) supplemented this body of just-war theory, focusing, however, on the relations between different Christian societies.[15]

The issue of relations with non-Christian societies came forcefully to prominence with the Spanish conquest of Central America. In this connection, Francisco de Vitoria (c. 1483–1546) argued, on the basis of Aquinas' teaching, that it was unjust to make war on a people just because of their unbelief, or because they did not accept Christianity when it was first proclaimed to them; however, violence was justified to prevent practices like cannibalism, which were against the law of nature, and demonstrably wrong both to Indians and Europeans.[16] Similarly, his contemporary, Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), argued that it was justified to make war to prevent human sacrifices, understandable as such sacrifices might possibly be, but only if the number of lives saved was likely to exceed the number of the casualties of war (a notable appeal to the balance of consequences).[17] Both Vitoria and Las Casas believed in principles which applied to the actions of Europeans and Indians too, as well as principles governing how Christians should behave towards non-believers. Las Casas in particular believed that, while the distinctive features of Indian culture must be appreciated, the common human nature and reasoning capacities of people of all cultures make them subject to common responsibilities nonetheless.

A key further step was taken by Alberico Gentili (1552–1608) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). In contrast with their scholastic predecessors, both these theorists sought to found international relations on a secular basis, independent of theology. 'Let theologians keep silence about matters outside their province!', remarked Gentili, who grounded international law in universal agreement, whether explicit or tacit.[18] For his part, Grotius appealed to human nature, and to the law of nature which he believed to be implicit in it, as valid

even if it were to be conceded that there is no God.[19] Thus belief in the difference between just and unjust wars, and thus in the global scope of ethics, was argued by both theorists to be independent of religious beliefs. Whether or not we regard their particular appeals to nature and to human nature as ground-breaking or persuasive, international ethics here importantly acquired once more, as among the ancient Stoics, a secular form and basis, capable of acceptance by people of any religious commitment or of none. The view that ethical reasons apply to everyone, irrespective of religious beliefs, just as prudential reasons do, is clearly crucial to a global ethic.

Also arguing on a secular basis, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) grounded international morality on the Categorical Imperatives (maxims capable of being universally adopted) which he considered that any rational being must recognise. Kant regarded states as persons from the moral point of view, for which it would be rational, without abandonment of sovereignty, to enter into a confederation of free states for the sake of peace and mutual protection. In support of his claims, he draws attention to the verbal homage which all states pay to morality by claiming to have justice on their side. Likewise, morality demands related conduct of individuals, and any moral agent is censured who adopts a maxim which, if universalised, would make lasting peace impossible. In other words, it is a duty of every human being to work towards a confederation of free states, or cosmopolitan society.[20] Morality thus applies to individuals and states alike, and to the relations between states and between societies, and it is not impossible for these relations to evolve into an ethical international order. Further, these claims themselves form examples of cross-cultural moral truth,[21] belief in which Kantian cosmopolitanism upholds. (Appropriately, Kant himself used the term 'cosmopolitan', in the title of his essay 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose'.)[22]

Some alternative varieties of cosmopolitanism will be discussed in the coming section, but it is worth mentioning here that aspects of Kantian cosmopolitanism have been recognised as a serious contribution by some contemporary theorists, alongside the *Realpolitik* of Machiavellianism and the Grotian belief in an international order of nations. Thus Hedley Bull, developing Martin Wight's characterisations of these theories of international relations,[23] writes of a cosmopolitan concept of justice which seeks to derive rights and duties neither from national loyalties nor from international law, but from the promotion of the common good of humanity, a concept which he regards as of special relevance to ecological or environmental

issues, although he is pessimistic about the prospects of its realisation.[24] This appeal to the common good clearly incorporates some non-Kantian, but still cosmopolitan, features; some non-Kantian varieties of cosmopolitanism will shortly be discussed.

But one objection to cosmopolitanism can be set aside without delay, the charge of Eurocentrism. Although Wight's theory of international relations has been accused of this form of ethnocentrism,[25] and although cosmopolitanism in particular has sometimes been associated with Enlightenment beliefs such as the belief in perpetual progress,[26] these associations are inessential to cosmopolitanism, and the kind of cosmopolitanism depicted by Bull and based on the common good of humanity need have nothing Eurocentric about it at all.

CONSEQUENTIALISM AND OTHER KINDS OF COSMOPOLITANISM

Rather than appealing, like Kant, to universalisable maxims, whether or not there is any chance of their being universally accepted, the position to which I adhere (and which I have defended elsewhere)[27] justifies practices by the balance of foreseeable consequences for all the parties affected (as compared with the consequences of alternatives), and justifies single actions on this same basis in cases where no such practice yet applies. Individuals and bodies with this stance take responsibility for shaping the future, not least through taking into account unintended but foreseeable consequences (regarded by Kant as morally irrelevant). Disregarding unintended outcomes is potentially disastrous, particularly where global systems are at risk. In this regard, I am closer to Las Casas than to Kant, and also to utilitarians, who standardly advocate promoting the balance of happiness over unhappiness. But consequentialists need not restrict their account of value and disvalue to human happiness and unhappiness, nor even to human interests; as indicated above, such an anthropocentric value-theory is excessively narrow, and consequentialists have no need to follow mainstream utilitarianism (at odds here with its founder, Jeremy Bentham) in adopting such a position. In that way they can take seriously foreseeable impacts of action which would affect non-human creatures of the present or the future.

Furthermore, consequentialists also hold that like interests count alike, wherever these interests are situated, and are thus committed to rejecting both the view that relationships must be present before

obligations can arise, and the view that obligations extend only towards community members. They therefore endorse the views of Stoics and Christians that morality extends to all human beings, the belief of just-war theorists that it applies to the relations between societies and between states, the view of Vitoria and Las Casas that this includes peoples not sharing one's own religion, and that of Gentili and Grotius that it does not depend on religious beliefs being held at all. They are also free to agree with Kant that states have an obligation to work towards a stable international order, and that individuals are also obligated to contribute to this process. While consequentialists have not always adopted these internationalist implications, the logic of their position implies that they should do so, or so I shall be arguing in later chapters.

Like Kantians, consequentialists can also recognise the possibility of cross-cultural moral truth (as claimed by moral objectivists), and the related possibilities of seeking and finding it (affirmed by moral cognitivists). While all consequentialists accept that morality applies across cultural boundaries, independent arguments are needed to uphold these additional claims about the status of moral discourse and beliefs. This is not the place fully to rehearse these arguments (which I have presented elsewhere).[28]

However, the types of available argument may be briefly mentioned. One concerns making sense of our talk of knowing the difference between right and wrong, and also of moral awareness, and the presuppositions which accompany such talk. Another concerns the way in which alternative theories, which seek to relativise morality to the attitudes of particular groups or communities, reduce moral claims to sociological ones, and do not account for the fact that moral claims and principles present interpersonal reasons for action. Another points to the possibility of agreement concerning independent or intrinsic value, and thus concerning what form these interpersonal reasons sometimes take. A further argument recognises that there are many kinds of 'oughts', but adds that the range of reasons underpinning moral 'oughts' both limits and at the same time structures what counts as an 'ought' in such contexts, so much so that moral questions are decidable in principle, and admit of truth, just as prudential and technological questions are and do.

Besides consequentialism and Kantianism, a cosmopolitan approach could be combined with a contract theory or with a rights theory of society and of ethics. Cosmopolitan alliances are possible between consequentialists and theorists of either stamp. For example, negotiators might reasonably devise an international regime for

carbon emission quotas on the contractarian basis of what would be agreed by all states in their own interests, irrespective of their bargaining position in the world as it is. However, particularly where environmental issues are in question, both of these theories suffer from serious shortcomings.

The appeal of contract theories partly depends on the assumption that whatever would be agreed to in a fair bargaining situation is just, and comprises a reasonable basis for social and possibly intersocietal co-operation. Thus they need not be concerned only with justice within particular societies, as John Rawls was in *A Theory of Justice*;[9] they can also be applied to relations between societies, as has been maintained by Brian Barry.[30] Some hold that they can even be applied to relations between successive generations, although the theoretical problems about bargaining between generations which are not contemporaries may well be insuperable.[31] Where, however, the assumption just mentioned clearly breaks down is over parties unable to bargain or make contracts which might safeguard their own interests; and of such parties, much the most numerically significant subset comprises all non-human creatures of the present and the foreseeable future. Since there could never be a contract which they could have agreed to without a change of nature and thus a loss of identity, we cannot assume that the rules derivable from imaginary ideal bargains, and such bargains only, are just and reasonable. If future interests and non-human interests are to be appropriately heeded, we need an ethic which neither excludes nor marginalises them, but which takes all these interests into consideration direct.

Here it may be suggested that we could instead argue from the rights of all parties liable to be affected by present actions and policies. I have no quarrel with taking rights seriously, wherever they can reliably be identified, although they should not, in my view, be regarded as fundamental in morality;[32] cosmopolitans of different persuasions, however, are free to unite in campaigning beneath the banner of human rights, including the right to a decent environment, and beneath that of animal rights too. The major problem for rights theories where the environment is in question, however, is that rights cannot be the basis of concern about that vast number of future people and other creatures whose identity is not yet determined. For such beings will not be individually better or worse off through present or imminent actions, as their very existence depends on these actions; different courses of action will result in different sets of future beings coming into existence,[33] and so no particular future beings (except

those already conceived) can have rights against current agents. So we cannot reason from the rights of future individuals to ways of respecting these supposed future rights in the present. What we can do instead is to discover the responsibilities of current agents from the needs or alternatively from the likely interests of whoever there will be. This form of reasoning is acceptable to consequentialists, but cannot be based on rights.

A further problem for rights theories concerns non-human species. While most people accept that members of these species have a good of their own, only a limited range of them could at all plausibly have rights. The suggestion that all moral reasoning must have a basis in rights limits the scope of moral reasoning too narrowly. People who grant that whatever has a good of its own should be taken into consideration implicitly accept the view that, rather than base everything on rights and their bearers, we should recognise the broader class of the bearers of moral standing, or of moral considerability, entities whose good or interests should be considered or respected.[34]

Thus, however much we should go along with the advocates of rights, we need to supplement what they say when reasoning either about the future or about those non-human species (species of invertebrates and of plants included) which seem not to have rights. At least in these contexts we need to appeal to the good or the well-being of the relevant entities direct; and if this can be done, then either rights do not comprise the sole basis of morality, or (because this appeal to well-being could be made across the board for all bearers of moral standing, whether they are bearers of rights or not) rights do not constitute the basis of morality at all. Accepting this is consistent with endorsing rights and the social or constitutional or international rules which enshrine them as of the utmost importance, albeit a derivative importance. The theory defended here endorses minority rights, and in general human rights and the rights of some animals too, on the basis just given, as was mentioned in Chapter 1.

Hence the position supported here is one which justifies rules, practices or (where these do not apply) actions on the basis of comparative balance of foreseeable consequences, as opposed to a basis of contracts, rights, or Kantian Categorical Imperatives. To this position, there are well-known objections, not all of which can be addressed in this book (and some of which I have attempted to address elsewhere);[35] some of these objections, such as those relating to our ignorance of the future, and the related impossibility of calculating distant costs and benefits, will receive attention in later chapters, when they become relevant. A further objection might

comprise the view that consequentialism, in common with other forms of cosmopolitanism, proceeds as if a worldwide moral community were already recognised by all moral agents; if this were so, then consequentialism would collapse forthwith, as would cosmopolitanism. But this would beg the question against the view that some people have obligations to foster such a worldwide moral community, a view which presupposes that it does not yet fully exist. Clearly cosmopolitanism (and consequentialism in particular) can consistently uphold this view, and so the objection falls.

Other generic objections to consequentialism concern its ability to handle issues of impartiality and justice, and to motivate and inspire its adherents to appropriate action. Julia Driver ably tackles issues about impartiality, and readers concerned about issues of this kind should turn to her works,[36] while I have considered issues of justice in Chapter 9 of *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics*.

As for issues of motivation, it is sometimes suggested that the gap between the world as it is and the world as it would be if the courses of action commended by consequentialism or by other forms of cosmopolitanism were implemented is so great as to suggest that no ethic of this character can avoid being futile and self-undermining, and that, accordingly, some form of communitarian ethic should be adopted instead.[37] Effectively, this argument runs, cosmopolitan obligations are incapable of being fulfilled and, because possible implementation is a condition of having an obligation, such obligations are not really obligations at all.

But this argument moves too quickly from facts about many agents failing to perform such duties to the full to such performance being altogether impossible. Evidence of global solidarity is readily to be found, in forms such as voluntary contributions to organisations like Oxfam, Médecins Sans Frontières, Christian Aid and Muslim Aid, the growing market for fair trade products, and the phenomenon of volunteers coming forward to work for bodies such as Voluntary Service Overseas and Ecumenical Accompaniers in Palestine and Israel. Further, this evidence suggests the possibility of the growth of global solidarity, in which the kind of care which is common among members of the same society is extended to distant strangers, to disappearing species and/or to planetary ecosystems.[38] Thus, performing cosmopolitan obligations is far from impossible, and the argument for such obligations being illusory is itself an all-too-convenient illusion.

In any case, grounds have already been presented against the view that obligations can only exist within a community; and consequentialism, far from assuming that a worldwide moral community exists,

does not even need to assume that such a community is fully possible (though I shall be arguing that it does involve obligations which presuppose that it is possible to move in the direction of such communality). In fact, consequentialism is applicable to situations of disaster and of minimal co-operation as well as to ones of near-Utopia, and to the range of cases in between; one of its strengths lies in its versatility in commending optimising strategies, however benign or adverse the circumstances and the prospects may be. Another dimension of its versatility lies in its capacity for fostering cultural toleration and respecting cultural diversity, except where agents are intolerant of toleration and diversity. Consequentialism is an ethic for all seasons.

CONSEQUENTIALISM AND PRINCIPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

As we have seen, the objections to Kantianism, contractarianism and rights-theory have special force in the field of environmental ethics, and these are objections to which consequentialism is not subject. But it remains to be seen whether consequentialism can cope with environmental concern, or at least with the more consistent versions of that concern, and supply the basis of a satisfactory ethic for interaction with environments and with the global environment. My response to these questions is continued in the next chapter, where a stewardship or trusteeship stance is defended, and argued to be compatible in scope and values with the form of consequentialism defended here. In this chapter I am concerned not with an overarching metaphysical position, but with some relevant principles of normative ethics, and thus of value and obligation.

The question of moral standing (or considerability) needs to be addressed first. Here I claim that whatever has a good of its own (or would have, if brought into being) has moral standing. One ground for this view is that beneficence is central to morality, and that all such entities are capable of being benefited; another is that there is no other consistent stopping place when anthropocentrism is rejected, as it must be (see above); another is that ethical concern is possible for just this range of entities. These entities include all living creatures, both of the present and of the foreseeable future, and so my theory is a biocentric theory. Of course, if equal concern were to be advocated for all these creatures, the upshot would be an ethic by which it would not even be possible to live; an egalitarian form of biocentrism is indefensible and impossible. But moral standing is not moral

significance, and bearing moral standing does not imply having equal significance with other such bearers. The moral significance of many creatures could be so slight as to be insignificant, except when the survival of large numbers (in the present or the future) is at issue, and even then their interests are outweighed when the vital interests of creatures with more sophisticated interests are at stake.

The moral significance of an interest depends on its intrinsic value, or its contribution to such value. Intrinsic value is understood here as a reason for action which is independent or non-derivative, and based solely in the nature of what has this value. All forms of consequentialism are committed to a theory of intrinsic value. For classical utilitarianism, for example, positive intrinsic value lay solely in happiness, and negative intrinsic value solely in unhappiness, and the same applies to its recent counterpart, Broad Utilitarianism.[39] For biocentric consequentialism, intrinsic value lies in the good or well-being of the bearers of moral standing. Following Aristotle, I take this good to consist in the development of the capacities essential to their kind, whether capacities for growth and reproduction (as in plants and animals alike), for mobility, perception and sentience (as in most animals), or for these plus capacities such as practical reason and autonomy, as in human beings. I also maintain that more complex and sophisticated capacities (such as that for autonomy) take precedence over simpler and less sophisticated ones, but only where both are at stake; no automatic priority belongs simply to membership of a sophisticated species, or simply to being human.[40] These claims would be resisted both by human chauvinists and by those who uphold the equality (on a one-for-one basis) of all living creatures; but neither of these parties can generate an ethic which is both consistent, tenable and defensible, unlike the position just introduced. (A more detailed defence of the value-theory presented here may be found in other essays of mine.)[41]

Many things also have value of other kinds, such as the value for observers of their beauty (inherent value), or their instrumental value to bearers of intrinsic value; and some of these, such as ecosystems, have so great an instrumental value, through facilitating the existence and flourishing of whole generations of creatures bearing intrinsic value, which could not exist without them, as to be capable of outweighing the value in the lives of even the individual human beings who could be brought into being and located there in their stead. In ways such as this, the biocentric theory which I am defending recognises the high value of many ecosystems, without recognising independent value in them, or moral standing either. Biodiversity

could be regarded by biocentrists in the same light (see Chapter 8), being a precondition of all terrestrial value.[42] The continued existence of species likewise has a high instrumental value, because on this depends the very possibility of the existence of every possible future member of the species in question, together with the value which they would have; accepting this does not involve recognising intrinsic value for species, unless, like their members, they can be shown to have a good of their own. But this would have to be a good independent of that of their actual members and of their possible members, and it is implausible that their good is completely independent in these terms.

Because the theory defended here rejects claims about the moral standing and the intrinsic value of species, ecosystems and biodiversity, it is to be distinguished from ecocentric theories, which affirm such claims. But where ecocentric theories also recognise the moral standing of individual creatures and the intrinsic value of their flourishing, they thus cover the moral standing and intrinsic value of these creatures twice over (at least), once as individuals and once as members either of ecosystems or of species, or possibly as both; and this seems an unnecessary duplication. And once biodiversity is recognised as a precondition of all terrestrial value, and valuable for this reason, no point remains in assigning it an additional value on a par with the individual creatures which it nourishes.

Consequentialism goes on to put forward related criteria of right, wrong and obligation. These criteria concern not the maxims of actions and whether they can be universalised, as in Kantianism, nor whether deeds comply with rules which everyone might agree to, as in contractarianism, nor whether they uphold natural rights, as in rights-theory, but with the foreseeable difference made either by practices or (where no practices apply) by individual actions or policies to good and bad states of affairs, that is, to intrinsic value and disvalue. When practices, policies or actions are being considered or appraised, their foreseeable impacts on all affected parties (that is, all affected bearers of moral standing) are to be taken into account. This is a global ethic in several dimensions, since the impacts to be considered are restricted neither temporally nor spatially, and since they supply reasons for action or restraint for all agents, in whatever community they may be situated.

The global scope of this ethic makes it relevant to practices affecting distant places, such as the world trading system, with its pronounced environmental impacts for the environment of Third World countries, and for practices affecting the distant future,

including the generation and storage of nuclear wastes. Unintended impacts of (say) five hundred years hence are ignored by Kantianism, and have no secure place in rights-theory or contractarianism; yet where they are avoidable, those who knowingly produce them have a clear moral responsibility in the matter, and it is one of the strengths of consequentialism that it recognises and underlines this. This and other implications of a consequentialist ethic will be investigated in greater detail in the coming chapters. Because consequentialism allows us to appraise technological and social systems, it also has the resources to go beyond 'end-of-pipe' (clean-up) solutions, and to advocate interventionist initiatives (such as programmes to enhance the efficiency of energy generation and use) where processes and outcomes would foreseeably be optimised in terms of overall value.

Meanwhile the related value-theory allows us to identify as environmental problems not only the causes of widespread costs for humanity (such as traffic pollution) but also damage or harm to non-human species, their ecosystems and their habitats, for the sake of non-human kinds. Biodiversity loss (which includes loss of natural habitats) now turns out to be a loss not only for humanity, present and future, but also for the creatures concerned, and for their successors whose existence is precluded. Similarly there are multiple reasons for identifying as global problems the destruction of forests, of wetlands and of coral reefs, reasons relating to their non-human inhabitants as well as their human beneficiaries. And while these are examples of global problems of the cumulative kind, the value-theory also underpins recognition of global environmental problems of the systemic kind (see Chapter 1), including global warming and gaps in the ozone layer. Such systemic problems involve costs for most if not all species; at the same time they are capable of distorting the evolutionary process itself, by changing the conditions in which it operates, and thus the range of creatures which it can generate. While cosmic processes are not intrinsically valuable, the theory recognises their overarching value by recognising the value in the lives of existing species (including their current populations) and also the value in the lives of the possible species which they can facilitate or, if distorted, can pre-empt.

While further implications of the ethical theory just presented will be elicited in Chapters 4 to 12, the role of humanity as trustees of nature, protecting the evolutionary process and its diverse products, will be further discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES

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28. Ibid., chs 3 and 12–14.
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