

University of Tartu
Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics

The Human Prejudice and the Problem of Sustainability –
Antropotsentrism ja jätkusuutlikkuse probleem

By Jeffrey *D* Gardner

Masters Thesis in Philosophy

Supervisor: Francesco Orsi

Tartu 2017

Thesis statement:

In order for humanity to maintain long term sustainable behavior while preserving core values (freedom, social fulfillment, artistic expression), the predominant form of human society (*the prevailing human culture*) must abandon the prevailing ideology characterized by a *human prejudice* which grants moral privilege to humans solely in virtue of their humanity. A new moral sensibility needs to be adopted that encourages a biocentric perception of the living members of our ecological communities as equal *ends-in-themselves*.

Table of Contents:

Introduction (4)

Chapter 1: Sustainability and the Prevailing Human Culture (5)

- 1.1 Unsustainable and the Environmental Crisis (7)
- 1.2 Human Culture and Exponential Population Growth (10)
- 1.3 The Problem of Human-Centered Ecology and Materialistic Culture (13)

Chapter 2: The Problem of the Human Prejudice (19)

- 2.1 The Ambiguity of Defining Humanity and Moral Inclusion (21)
- 2.2 Rejecting Arguments for less Dramatic Ideological Changes (25)

Chapter 3: The Transition and the Consequences of Losing the Human Prejudice (31)

- 3.1 Consequentialist concerns in changing our moral code (31)
- 3.2 A Self-defeating Strategy? (33)
- 3.3 Ethical Cost (34)
- 3.4 Political Cost (39)
- 3.5 The Remaining Moral Questions and the Advancement of Ethics (41)

Conclusion (43)

Abstract (45)

Bibliography (46)

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to argue that the internalization of a biocentric moral code and the abandonment of the human prejudice is both philosophically desirable as well as socially and ecologically beneficial. The following will describe the ecological crisis, its human cause, and explain the philosophical inadequacies of our current anthropocentric moral sensibilities as well as addressing the ethical and political consequences of changing our moral paradigm to be biocentric oriented. The goal is to find a way to alter our behavior to complement our ecosystems instead of harming and degrading them without sacrificing essential values that make our lives meaningful. I hope this thesis presents a fresh take on biocentrism that applies existentialist ideas to the field of environmental ethics and present a practical moral sensibility that is both rational and beneficial. Ultimately we will find our human prejudice to be grounded in an irrational nepotism in our own favor that has created the circumstances that threaten the future of both ourselves and many of our ecological neighbors.

Chapter 1: Sustainability and the Prevailing Human Culture

This chapter will define the nature of the environmental crisis and show, using empirical evidence, it is caused by the behavior of the *prevailing human culture*; ultimately we will see the root of this problem lies in our culture's current ethical sensibility of 'humans' in relation to nonhuman elements of the environment.

The scientific evidence at our disposal overwhelmingly suggests there exists a serious ecological problem: a crisis caused by the dominant human society's unsustainable behavior. For this thesis I will approach '*Sustainability*' as that which refers to a community's ability to be supported long term by its ecosystem. This, I believe, even within a strictly human context, requires the preservation of a variety of keystone species (species that serve critical roles in the functioning of an ecosystem) such as bees which we depend on for crop pollination or phytoplankton which produces the majority of Earth's oxygen. The US Environmental Protection Agency provides an adequate definition of sustainability for this thesis: "To pursue sustainability is to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations" (epa.gov 2016). In this first chapter, I am concerned only with measuring the costs pertaining to the preservation of the present and future generations of humans which serves to show the ecological threat to present day society. This first chapter serves to show that there is a human caused ecological crisis that possess a threat to the continued thriving of the both natural ecosystems and the human species, moreover current efforts in "environmentalism" is inadequate to solve this crisis. My argument in chapter 1 frames the ecological crisis in terms of humans but this does not presuppose anthropocentrism. It only presupposes that things are bad enough if they are bad for humans (it does not commit to saying that they are bad *only if* they are bad for humans).

An *ecosystem* is defined as a community of living organisms interacting with essential nonliving elements of their environment (e.g rivers, the nitrogen cycle, soil, etc.); in other words, "the complex of living organisms, their physical environment, and all their interrelationships in a particular unit of space" (Encyclopædia Britannica 2015). In the current crisis, our problem lies not in an isolated ecosystem but in the *biosphere* as a whole – defined as the unity of all ecosystems that exist on Earth. Some scientists categorize the whole

biosphere as a single ecosystem (some, such as James Lovelock, may claim the biosphere is a single organism in itself), but for the sake of this project the biosphere need only be the interconnected collective of all Earth's ecosystems. Our 'biological community' is composed of the living members that play a part in the ecosystems we depend on and refers to the network of life that interdependently makes up the living systems of Earth that we as a species are a part of.

Most scientists within the relevant fields (e.g. biology, conservation, ecology) have almost unanimously recognized the fact that the current trend of human behavior, if left unrestrained, will eventually result in some sort of collapse of Earth's ecosystems. This is to say the habitat of Earth will eventually no longer be able to support humans and many other species due to the behavior of the *prevailing human culture*. In fact, if humans do not begin to voluntarily change their behavior immediately and drastically, degradation in the environment will force them to, resulting in a violent transition marked by widespread suffering and death (this, I suppose, is worst case scenario - for humans anyway). We seem to be quickly moving towards a fate foretold by Murray Bookchin in, "Toward an Ecological Society", "the biosphere will become so fragile that it will eventually collapse from the standpoint of human survival needs and remove the organic preconditions for human life" (Bookchin 1980: 83).

For the purpose of this thesis, I define the *prevailing human culture* as the widespread form of human society marked by two key characteristics: The first being the fact that the prevailing culture, without restriction, takes resources from the ecosystem – whether through the excessive use of fossil fuels or through the depletion of soil nutrients for food production: the prevailing culture takes a lot and provides little to the ecosystem. The second and most important characteristic for this thesis is the fact that this culture is characterized by an anthropocentric ideology that humans possess a special value with increased privileges based solely on their membership to humanity – described here on out as the *human prejudice*.

There are other unique characteristics of the prevailing human culture that are not a direct concern of this thesis, however, one additional characteristic is the great extent to which the prevailing human culture transforms its habitat: we transform the habitat to create productive land, change the course of rivers, dig up mountains in search of valuable minerals, and modify animals to create new breeds for domestication. Obviously much of this transformation is at odds with sustainability and treating the life within an ecosystem as an

end-in-itself, however, I do not intend to argue that this transformation is inherently wrong, my intent (as this thesis develops) instead is to challenge us to figure out how we can transform the habitat to our favor without doing excessive harm to the ecosystem and reducing the variety of nonhuman life strictly to a tool for our own gain.

1.1 – Unsustainability and the Environmental Crisis

Since the prevailing human culture has spread across all of Earth, the object of environmental concern has become the entire planet, and although humans could theoretically expand beyond Earth into outer space the same problem would eventually arise; if humans had a larger planet or multiple planets to expand to, the current behavior of the *prevailing human culture* still could not be sustained as a matter of fact. Since this thesis is concerned with the biosphere of Earth, some may ask why concern is not directed at all life (e.g. at aliens). The day may come when doing so is appropriate, but we are concerned with the biosphere because of our relationship with it and the lifeforms that it is composed of; a theoretical alien race at this point in our history has no relevant relation to us, so at the moment the biosphere is the only realm where ethical questions should be asked.

There exists a cultural trend of exponential growth and expansion characterized by what Bookchin calls a ‘grow or die’ fact of life (Bookchin 1980). Today we may associate the characteristic of exponential growth with industrialization, however, industrialization merely accelerated an already occurring phenomenon of the prevailing human culture that had been present for centuries before hand (e.g. Ancient Greece). From the point of view of what’s best for the biosphere, this dominant human culture is not *working* as it should. The task at hand can be referred to as “saving the world” both from humans and *for* humans. It may very well be true that with man gone there will be increased hope for the survival of gorillas – this entails that the elimination of humans from Earth could save the rest of the natural world, but in this thesis I will only assume that we want to save the world of gorillas and people.

Here I will illustrate the thesis of this chapter with respect to one phenomenon in particular: *loss of biodiversity*. It is safe to say that at this point loss of biodiversity and destruction of ecosystems is beginning to reach critical levels. *Biodiversity* is defined as the variation of life within an ecosystem (Faith 2016). According to many reputable biologists, we are now fast approaching a ‘mass extinction event’ that has only happened five times in the

known history of Earth. These events are marked by the overwhelming widespread loss of biodiversity through the extinction of species. Furthermore, this particular mass extinction is argued to be triggered directly by the actions of humans. Claims of “mass extinction” might sound dramatic, associated with predictions of apocalyptic hellfire from volcanoes or meteors. However, mass extinction doesn’t have to be so theatrical, when scientists say “mass extinction” they are merely stating that current extinction rates are many times higher than average historical or natural extinction rates – and considering the massive loss of natural habitat over the last 500 years this should not come as too much of a surprise; humans after all have transformed massive portions of the Earth into artificial ecosystems and urban population centers at the cost of nonhuman life every step of the way. A study conducted by biologists from universities including Stanford, Princeton, and Berkeley used “conservative measurements” to compare the extinction rates of species today, to the extinction rates of species during the past mass extinction events and to a control group (the normal extinction rates of species). If the theory is correct we have now, “without any significant doubt”, entered the beginning stages of a 6th great mass extinction:

This [loss of biodiversity] affects human well-being by interfering with crucial ecosystem services such as crop pollination and water purification and by destroying humanity’s beautiful, fascinating, and culturally important living companions (4, 5, 15, 27–30). [...] Our analysis shows that current extinction rates vastly exceed natural average background rates, even when (i) the background rate is considered to be double previous estimates and when (ii) data on modern vertebrate extinctions are treated in the most conservative plausible way (brackets added) (Ceballos, et al. 2015: 3).

Other research measuring the global loss of biodiversity has been done by R. Dirzo, who claims:

The evidence that we have just reviewed indicates that a massive extinction event, driven by human beings, has been underway for some 40,000 years. In recent times, when we have more exact estimates of extinction, the situation has become far more drastic, as reviewed recently by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) (Dirzo, et al 2003: 154).

Whether one wishes to call the current loss of species a “mass extinction event” or not is inconsequential, the central claim is the biosphere is currently losing an incredibly large numbers of species and it is reasonable to claim that this loss will eventually result in a negative impact to humans.

Loss of biodiversity and the extinction of species is *not* in itself inherently bad (species naturally go extinct all the time) nor do I wish my argument in this thesis to imply or rely on any cosmological or intrinsic significance of “life”. However, as stated above, many species that are going extinct play a significant role in the cycles of life on Earth. One example is the regional loss of pollinators (such as bees and butterflies), as many plants are dependent on them to reproduce and animals, including humans, are dependent on these plants for food. As of early 2017, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service added the once common rusty patched bumblebee (one of Eastern North America's most productive native pollinators) to the endangered species list (FWS 2017). The reasons for the decline of pollinators is generally attributed to a cocktail of pesticides used for human agriculture (Chagnon et al, 22: 2008). Another system that is in danger are the Earth’s marine food webs due to overfishing on a global scale. Research done by marine biologist, Daniel Pauly, claims that:

Fishing down food webs (that is, at lower trophic levels) leads at first to increasing catches, then to a phase transition associated with stagnating or declining catches. These results indicate that present exploitation patterns are unsustainable (Pauly, et al. 1998: 860).

This is problematic because humans across the globe are deeply dependent on various marine food webs for their very livelihood, and the collapse of these ecosystems could be catastrophic not just for the prevailing human culture but all humans that depend on marine resources.

Today the issue of global climate change has taken the forefront of environmental concern, with the vast majority of research supporting the claim that global climate change is real, human caused, and is the source of many detrimental environmental issues including rising ocean levels, spread of invasive species, and extinction of keystone species.

“The opinions of scientists with greater expertise converge, and they expect larger temperature increases, higher percentages of species extinctions, and a high percentage of species’ ranges will change in response to climate change over the next 100 years” (Javeline 2013: 666).

The human cause of climate change is mostly associated with the emission of greenhouse gases through the burning of fossil fuels. “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) leaves little doubt that global warming is occurring and is caused primarily from carbon dioxide emissions from human fossil fuels” (Holechek 2007: 35).

It is important to point out that while climate change is on the forefront of today's environmental mind, in reality it is but one issue in a sea of potential ecological catastrophes, and the issue at hand is not avoided by climate change deniers. In no way is my argument dependent on the existence of "global warming"; sustainability issues extend far beyond it and have existed well before we had any knowledge of human caused climate change. The environmental problems I have described above are but a small sample of the environmental issues we face today and there are numerous human caused ecological problems that I do not have the space to describe.

1.2 – Human Culture and Exponential Population Growth

The question now arises: how exactly are these environmental problems related to what I call the *human prejudice*? Well, most environmental problems can be, in one way or another, reduced to one underlying issue: *overpopulation*. Humans have been able to maintain population at an unprecedented high level, one that is unsustainable in the long term – evidence of which can be found in the massive loss of natural habitat that has been destroyed to meet the demand for human shelter and food consumption. It can be argued that humanity has been well beyond its "carrying capacity" for some time now, meaning human population is beyond the point in which the resources of the biosphere can support us indefinitely – that is, unless human population starts to dramatically lower itself we will be facing ecosystems in the future with scarce resources plagued by starvation and accompanied by war waged over access to food and water. It should be stated, though, that the nature of modern society makes human *carrying capacity* nearly impossible to pinpoint exactly.

Although deteriorating environmental conditions may be symptoms of the human population reaching carrying capacity, we do not know what the carrying capacity of humans would be if changes occurred in our behavior and technology (Gehrt 1991: 901).

Regardless of how far we can theoretically extend our potential carrying capacity, the fact remains that human population is dangerously high and even considering possible human innovation and advancements it should be agreed that human population is dangerously close to depleting Earth of its vital human-survival resources which entails that as resources become more scarce, a period of dramatic and violent reduction in human population is on the horizon.

The problem of overpopulation has a cause as well – *all* species grow in population in regards to the food and resources at their disposal. Exponential population growth is not unique to humans, but generally the natural limits of resource gathering and the nature of competition between species prevents it from occurring on such a scale. Additionally, most species lack the cognitive ability necessary to find innovative means of increasing their carrying capacity. In humans, our cognition and cooperation allows us to deplete resources beyond a normal species, and the ideologies we have adopted have encouraged overpopulation to continue and accelerate.

This overpopulation phenomenon is the result of how the *prevailing human culture* interacts with its food and its competitors for food. The cognitive capacity of humans combined with certain behaviors and attitudes allowed overpopulation to occur on this massive scale; we have adopted a mindset that encourages the production of more than we need and this in turn encourages population growth. A community simply cannot grow in population and outcompete its neighbors without having a serious advantage in terms of resources at their disposal; when one community of humans began to not only outcompete but started to overwhelm, annihilate, and subjugate surrounding human communities they had to have had an advantage that allowed them to disrupt the natural order of competition. The theory is that the dominating communities had abundant resources at their disposal that they could use on war and population growth while other communities of humans were not storing up massive amounts of resources that could be funneled into a war effort. This allowed the dominating human communities to do what no animal ever had the means to do in the past: annihilate their competition.

This behavior is a result of certain ideologies and mentalities that the *prevailing human culture* has developed: A mindset to treat the life that contributes to the production of our food as nothing but a commodity (a means to an end) and also to treat nonhuman competitors for our food as something to be subjugated or annihilated. This then lead to the prevailing human culture to develop the tendency to *annihilate, subjugate, and integrate* competing human cultures who are not “making good enough use of the land”– this is to say that the prevailing human culture encourages the conquering of outside communities and their integration into the lifestyle of this dominant culture. The mentality of the *prevailing human culture* does not merely dominate nature, it does so to humans as well; Bookchin describes the effect

“hierarchical mentality” has on the human dominion over nature (Bookchin 1980) – to me this involves a higher class which controls the resources and forces the lower class to work and expand in order for them to gain access to an adequate portion of those resources.

A good illustration of the ideology to expand and dominate can be seen in the concept of *Manifest Destiny* used in the early United States to encourage American society to develop westward; used in the early 1800’s by President James Polk and characterized by a religious drive to conquer and develop the west of North America that was inhabited by Native Americans, much to the distaste to the early American naturalist Henry David Thoreau who wrote “Civil Disobedience” in direct response to Polk’s presidency. According to scholar in Native American studies, Robert Miller:

Historians have for the most part agreed that there are three basic themes to Manifest Destiny. 1. The special virtues of the American people and their institutions; 2. America’s mission to redeem and remake the world in the image of America; and, 3. A divine destiny under God’s direction to accomplish this wonderful task. It was pretty easy and comfortable for Americans to accept that their virtue, mission, and divine ordination mandated the expansion of America’s borders because that thinking helped salve American consciences about empire building and the possibility that the Oregon country and the lands taken in the 1846 Mexican-American war were nothing more than American “colonies” (Miller 2006: 120).

Here the domination of nature and native lands and the transformation of the “wilderness” of the west was not merely encouraged, it was essentially demanded both by “American exceptionalism” and the Christian God.

However, this characteristic of storing resources, increasing population, and expanding outward remained inconsequential on the global scale up to a point in human history. While preindustrial societies like Ancient Greece exhibited these unsustainable characteristics, the society was simply limited in the extent to which it could expand – limits that are no longer in place due to industrialization and the technological advancements of the modern age accelerated even more by the growth demanded by modern capitalism. Even if we were to dramatically reduce human population, without also changing our ethical sensibilities we would hardly be solving the problem of sustainability. While overpopulation remains a key factor in unsustainability it is also true that majority of the blame of much of today’s ecological harm can be placed on the behavior of a small minority of humans living today, and while the demand for resources by our massive population is a great contributor we must recognize that regardless of population size we must curb our behavior. In other words a large

portion of humans could disappear from Earth and it would be hardly beneficial for the biosphere if the rest of us continue with the same destructive production-based behavior. “We must change people's behavior whether or not we stem the tide of population growth. If behavior and technology can wreak such havoc, why can they not be a source of salvation?” (Gehrt 1996, 902). While in many regards our technology is a driving force for our current ecological problems, this is only so because we advance our technology with the mindset and ideology of the prevailing human culture. *Technology in itself is not to be blamed*, it is the mindset in which we use and create it that poses the problem. The anthropocentric prejudice of the *prevailing human culture* allowed and encouraged population growth which was then accelerated by technology – this means our use of technology is a major contributor and accelerator of the environmental problem but the source remains in an ideology that has been adopted by the prevailing human culture.

1.3 – The Problem of Human-Centered Ecology and Materialistic Culture

I will now reject opponents who do not believe an ideological change of any sort is necessary, useful, or desirable in relation to the environment. These opponents do not merely defend anthropocentrism but wish to cling to something along the lines of a biblical concept of human dominion over land, and claim that any sort of environmental change should be done through single issue reforms and policy changes or through a cost-benefit analysis based on human interests. Mark Sagoff provides us with examples of arguments from this camp; he describes an economic view on the environment that would create policy in response to an economic cost-benefit analysis of environmental protection:

When this [when environmental policy is designed through an economic cost-benefit analysis] is done, they [some economists] argue, pollution will be controlled, endangered species will be saved, and pristine areas will be preserved, but only to the extent that the benefits therefrom exceed the costs. Any increase in environmental protection from an “optimal” level “would cost more than it is worth.” While any decrease would “reduce benefits more than it would save cost” (brackets added) (Sagoff 1981: 1393-1394).

However, Sagoff replies that such a view ignores the fact that our society's motivations in protecting the environment are not merely reduced to ‘economic benefits’, they also come from the desire for other benefits such as cleaner air and water which cannot be reduced to economic profit. Setting aside economic interests, a cost-benefit analysis can also be focused on broader human interests. To this, conservation biologist, Stanley Gehrt, argues that

approaching conservation from a human cost-benefit analysis will fail to initiate the desired change:

Because North American culture is largely materialistic and anthropocentric, attempts to demonstrate the value of biodiversity have centered on direct or indirect benefits to humans (Wilson 1988; Primack 1993). However necessary these cost-benefit efforts are, there are limitations to their effectiveness, and they may not always produce the desired results (Ehrenfeld 1988; Primack 1993). The true value of biodiversity is inevitably minimized when a cost-benefit rationale is used (Gehrt 1996: 902).

I would add that it is dangerous to attempt to calculate the costs of tampering with natural ecosystems as we are rarely fully aware of the impact our actions have at the moment we exploit an element of nature. Humans a lot of the time do not realize the negative effects of their environmental meddling until after a problem has already emerged; we did not know of the threat of global warming until long after the effects of climate change were well in motion due to our use of fossil fuels, nor did we foresee the Great American Dust Bowl of the 1930's which was caused by erosion from decades of poor farming practices and left the land barren for decades.¹ Our ignorance is illustrated by Aldo Leopold and his experience of the hunting of predators in North America and the results of unregulated hunting practices which he partook in:

In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. [...] We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes- something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view (brackets added) (Leopold 1949: 129-130).

Leopold goes on to explain that without wolves, the deer population exploded and trimmed the mountain bare of vegetation which eventually resulted in the starvation of the deer and the erosion of the mountain. This serves as a metaphor for the Earth as a whole and how every part of it plays a role in its continued balance whether they realize it or not. When we act with only a concern for human costs and benefits we inadvertently cause harm to not just other lifeforms but to ourselves eventually as well. When it comes to rational environmental action

¹The American Dust Bowl was an event that occurred in the midwest farmlands of the US in the 1930's and was marked by a horrible drought accompanied by brutal dust storms ("black blizzards") which dislocated mass numbers of farmers and their families. It is described by some as the worst man-made disaster of the 20th century. Long term use of poor farm techniques (e.g. deep-soil plowing) essentially turned the soil into dust making it not only unfarmable but essentially created hundreds of miles of barren wasteland which was eloquently captured by John Steinbeck's novel, *Grapes of Wrath*.

of humans we cannot merely measure the costs in terms of the *known* costs – the interconnected effect that different life-forms within an ecosystem have on one another is far too high.

A main argument from Sagoff [written in support of arguments made by Michael Krieger (1973) in “What’s Wrong with Plastic Trees”] focuses only on the benefits of environmentalism from the human point of view. Sagoff argues in “On Preserving the Natural Environment”, the total replacement of natural environments with artificial ones is entirely acceptable and even preferable. Sagoff claims: “Nature is a war of each against all, as Hobbes said, and man and beast alike prefer the safety and comfort of an artificial environment” (Sagoff 1974: 222). Sagoff goes on to claim that, “except for the limit of our technology, however, there is no economic or even utilitarian rationale available for preserving the natural environment” (Sagoff 1974: 225). Sagoff seems to believe the solution to our ecological problems can be found in the advancement of our technology, and living in an almost entirely artificially designed and maintained world is both possible and desirable.

I would counter, however, that he has vastly overestimated the ability of technology. Nonetheless, many adhere to the view that this is the form that human progress has taken and will continue to do so as we “progress” into the future – “Man has chosen to live in manufactured habitats ever since he came down from the trees; there is no reason to think his trend away from nature will change today” (Sagoff 1974: 221). However, I would dispute firstly that not all humans have migrated away from nature and second, mankind’s happiness and fulfillment has not necessarily increased as we perpetually put up stronger boundaries between ourselves and nature. Our concrete sanctuaries and artificial society may have increased our lifespans but many claim that members of ‘civilized’ modern society are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression as well as having a decreased sense of purpose. In support of this claim I look at research conducted by anthropologist, Edward Schieffelin, who interviewed over 2,000 Aboriginal Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea and only found one subject who presented marginal symptoms of clinical depression, and this is despite the high rate of infant mortality, parasitic infection, and violent death that the Kaluli people suffer from (Schieffelin 1985). Depression within Kaluli society, he says, is “a disorder that seems to be rare and is not culturally recognized” (Schieffelin 1985: 107).²

²“Kaluli society is egalitarian. There are no big men or traditional positions of authority among the various longhouse communities. Each individual is customarily expected to take his own initiative in making his way in

In addition, there is reason to doubt the ability of technological advancement to one day artificially replace all aspects of organic nature that we are dependent on for survival – technology in itself is not energy nor is it food, it is merely a tool we use to survive and to thrive. To this, Taylor asserts that, “To think we have complete control over the environment, or that we will have such control someday, is a sign of arrogance and an illusion of grandeur. The results of that self-deception are all too evident in the world around us” (Taylor 1986: 104). Furthermore, it is generally accepted that artificial environments are incredibly fragile due to their simplicity, explained here by Bookchin:

Ecologists have already pointed out that the more simplified an ecosystem – as in arctic and desert biomes or in monocultural forms of food cultivation – the more fragile the ecosystem and more prone it is to instability, pest infestations, and possible catastrophes (Bookchin 1980: 75).

Bookchin goes on to claim that, “The system in its devouring of nature will reduce the entire biosphere to the fragile simplicity of desert and arctic biomes” (Bookchin 1980: 83). Generally our artificial ecosystems are very simplistic, such as in monoculture food cultivation. Our widespread use of GMO crops makes these ecosystems even more fragile due to the reduction of the genetic diversity of crops which makes them more susceptible to diseases (consider the Irish potato famine of 1845 that occurred largely due to the Irish’s dependence on a single species of potato that was targeted by a blight). Theoretically we could create more complex ecosystems but that is certainly not a reflection of our current artificial environments. As of now, the creation of a society completely dependent on artificial environments seems to risk placing us in a fragile situation plagued by the potential for catastrophe.

My final objection to this appeal to entirely artificial societies as is argued for by Krieger and Sagoff is that it may put humans in a situation to be easily oppressed and put at the mercy of huge corporations or whoever it is that maintains the artificial world (this trend, I think, has already started to occur). This is to say that human survival would be completely dependent on the people controlling and maintaining the artificial community. For example, if we replace natural pollinators with tiny drones, then whoever controls the drones controls whose crops get pollinated. It seems living in an entirely or mostly artificial world risks putting all of us at the mercy of the people that control the technology and the threat of collapsing into a dystopia seems to be a very real possibility.

Kaluli society and gaining support of others” (Schieffelin 1985: 108).

The underlying problem with the views of Sagoff and Krieger is that the concept of human dominion over the land and its inhabitants remains unquestioned, and while we can try to alter our behavior so as to have a less severe effect on the land this will hardly solve our ecological problems. Bookchin in, “Toward An Ecological Society”, describes the Nixon style “environmentalist” that merely wants the knowledge on how to take from the nature without repercussions for the economic structure of society:

Mr. Nixon, I would suppose, is an “environmentalist” of sorts insofar as the “peace” he would establish with nature consists of the “know-how” for plundering the natural world with minimal disruption of the habitat. “Environmentalism” does not bring into question the underlying notion of the present society that man must dominate nature (Bookchin 1980: 74-75).

Bookchin argues for the necessity of radical ecological change in society, one that requires both behavioral changes and dramatic ideological changes in not just how we view “the wholeness of nature” but also in the current hierarchical mentality of human society. “Either we will create an ecotopia based on ecological principles, or we will simply go under as a species. In my view this is not apocalyptic ranting— it is a scientific judgment that is validated daily by the very law of life of the prevailing society” (Bookchin 1980: 85). This “law of life” pertains to the ‘grow or die’ economic structure brought to its full fruition by capitalism.

Notice that we have not yet come to question anthropocentrism or the increased moral value of humans; in this chapter, I am merely stating that moral conceptions around the environment need to change, in some way, and mere policy changes or technological advancement in the structure of society ignore the true issue at hand. Limited space prevents me from covering and criticising all possible alternatives to my proposal. Even radical economic change, such as replacing capitalism with socialist policy is insufficient – as human dominion over land would still be morally justifiable entailing the possible persistence of our ecologically harmful behavior – economic change must be accompanied by a change in moral sensibility. Chapter II will begin the discussion on the nature and the severity of the ideological change that is needed within this *prevailing human culture*.

As I transition into Chapter II, the facts attained through scientific research should make it clear that from an objective ecological point of view there is a problem with how the *prevailing human culture* is behaving; this is to say that as far as the ecological systems of Earth are considered there is something wrong with *us*: something wrong with certain

characteristics of the *prevailing human culture*, something that is not *working* in the ecological sense. This, human “*us*”, is a concept under serious debate within this thesis. This collective “us” or “we” refers to this concept of humanity as something united under what, in my terminology, is called the “human tribe”. The human tribe has three defining characteristics, (1) they more or less engage in the same unsustainable practices, (2) recognize each other as human, and (3) it is a perceived human community that adheres to the concept that human beings in virtue of some unique characteristic are granted special privileges in relation to everything else. The existence of this human tribe, or at least the current form of it, is flawed and riddled with contradiction, and will be thoroughly addressed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: The Problem of the Human Prejudice

In the previous chapter I pointed out the ecological disasters that can be prevented or reduced by a change in ethical sensibility. In this chapter I argue that the human prejudice is also philosophically indefensible. The desirable ecological change needs to come about through an ideological change within *the prevailing human culture*: To change how we conceive of this worldwide *human tribe* (as defined in chapter 1), eliminate the *human prejudice*, and replace it with a disposition that values all members of our biological community (outside personal tribes) as holding equal moral value regardless of species. This means I am arguing on behalf of a biocentric view; *biocentrism* includes all views within environmental ethics that expand the status of moral objects from the human to all living things in nature. Taylor asserts 4 core biocentric beliefs that a rational and factually informed moral agent should accept:

- (a) The belief that the human are members of the Earth's Community of Life in the same sense and on the same terms in which other living things are members of that community.
- (b) The belief that the human species, along with all other species, are integral elements in a system of interdependence such that the survival of each living thing, as well as its chances of faring well or poorly, is determined not only by the physical conditions of its environment but also by its relations to other living things.
- (c) The belief that all organisms are teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unique individual pursuing its own good in its own way,
- (d) The belief that humans are not inherently superior to other living things. (Taylor 1986: 99-100).

In this thesis, biocentrism involves adopting the view that all living members of the ecological community should be seen always as an *end in itself* and never *merely* as a means to one's own end: "to extend the recognition of "ends in themselves" beyond the sphere of man and make the human good include the care for them" (Jonas 1984: 8). Therefore, the answer to why we need this biocentrism is: first, the fact that it is a practically desirable moral sensibility that provides a solution to the ecological crisis that impacts our relation to the biosphere. Second, humans are inherently morally-driven creatures and if we find the human tribe to be philosophically indefensible then we need to find a rationally defensible community to apply our morality to. Just because we find our human-biased mortality irrational does not mean we can no longer apply our morality to the world.

The only argument for an increased moral value or obligation to humans can be made about oneself and the members of one's *personal tribes*. The "personal tribe" depends partly on who one subjectively values the life and freedom of, but I define it as a private community of individuals that have a *social and symbiotic relationship* with each other – the beings that make one's life worth living. Generally humans are members of multiple overlapping personal tribes; these tribes can exist for short periods of time or be life long depending on the circumstances. Personal tribes, by their very nature, cannot include the whole of humanity due to the fact that they are "personal" and are characterized by the social and biological relationships an individual has with members of his or her community that is impossible to have in relation to the entire human species. The importance of this personal tribe and its role in how we morally justify certain actions will be readdressed in Chapter 3 when I address the consequences of abandoning the human prejudice.

The underlying cause of our unsustainability, argued here, are certain aspects of our current ethical sensibility – namely this *human prejudice* which I define as the internalization of the idea that humans are special and because they are special they deserve to have special rights. A complementary definition, provided by Bernard Williams, is that the *human prejudice* is something along the lines of the existence of *human rights* for *us* and granted by *us*, "rights that are possessed by certain creatures because they are human beings, in virtue of their being human" (Williams 2006: 138); the 'rights' Williams is talking of here refer to an entitlement to be treated preferentially by other humans.

This chapter is tasked with explaining in what sense our culture perceives of "humanity" and explains why we think there is such a tribe despite the fact that the human tribe is both a philosophically inadequate notion and harmful to sustainability. Lastly it will address opponents (Williams and Bookchin) who, despite rejecting traditional assumptions about the importance of humans, still defend the preservation of "humanity" with a special worth thus justifying the persistence of some sort of human prejudice. The human prejudice is the central feature of the ethical sensibility of what in chapter 1 I called the prevailing human culture.

Since I make this distinction between all humans and the prevailing human culture – one may point to behavior of an external and isolated community (i.e. an organic self-sustaining community) and argue it is exhibiting anthropocentric behavior just as well.

However, key differences in our situations make this point irrelevant; (1) organic communities are not exponentially depleting their ecosystems of resources (e.g. the Bushmen of the Kalahari desert of southern Africa seem to be working within the limits of their ecosystem (New World Encyclopedia Contributors 2016)). (2) Individuals in organic communities generally do not fully comprehend the global effects human action is having on the environment, while our society is fully aware of the environmental circumstances of Earth. (3) The cultures of these organic communities are so vastly different from our own, it is really not appropriate to apply to them the same concepts - ‘anthropocentrism’ and ‘biocentrism’. The relations various organic communities have with nature can only properly be defined within those cultures and we commit folly when we apply our own concepts to them. The large scale sustainability problems are unique to the prevailing human culture and while organic communities may suffer from shortcomings the focus is on us and what we need to do in order to make rational and beneficial change.

The human prejudice developed into this overwhelming ecological problem for the prevailing human culture as it combined with technology and population growth, and it is the source of our inability to change our behavior today because of the increased *self-consciousness* that has evolved as a result of the skill in which we pass down our human-centered values, attitudes, and “knowledge” from generation to generation. This chapter will serve to show the philosophical inadequacies of this human prejudice.

2.1 – The Ambiguity of Defining Humanity and Moral Inclusion

Historically in ethics, when we defined “humanity” we would try to do so in a way that would grant all members of the human species a special moral status without also including any member of any other species. The discussion develops into a debate on what exactly is a *human* (in an ethically relevant sense). David McNaughton describes the difficulty that ethicists have had in creating a system of moral inclusion that includes all humans and only humans:

If the standard inclusion in the sphere of moral concern is put too high then not only will most nonhumans be excluded but so will some humans. [...] If the standard is set so low that all humans are included then many animals will gain entry and hence the special place of humans will again be threatened (brackets added) (McNaughton 1991: 72).

Elsewhere Douglas McLean recognizes, “the problem is that no morally relevant property is unique to humans, and no uniquely human property seems to be morally relevant” (McLean 2010: 17). Basically, it has not been an easy task for ethicists to define the human in a unique and ethically satisfactory way, and as knowledge of the cognitive abilities of animals increases, the line between the human realm and nonhuman realm seems to be increasingly blurred which gives biocentrists, like Paul Taylor, good ground in their denial of humans as morally unique or superior. Biology, mutual human recognition, living amongst humans, and the mental capacities of reason, self-reflection or language are all potential ways humans have attempted to define the criteria for a special moral status reserved for humans and only for humans. In “The Ethics of Respect for Nature”, Taylor expresses the fact that generally our extension of increased moral concern to humans is not withheld merely on the grounds that a particular human lacks the traits that we value as *the* human traits (reason, self-awareness, language, etc.); such humans include infants, the severely retarded, and feral children (children brought up away from other humans). We morally treat humans as humans not because of their intelligence or our ability to communicate but simply because they are human. We are then put in the situation where our special moral concern for humanity can only be supported by the notion of sharing certain genetic traits which is philosophically problematic:

Why should the arrangement of genes of a certain type be a mark of superior value, especially when this fact about an organism is taken by itself, unrelated to any other aspect of life? We might just as well refer to any other genetic make as a ground of superior value. Clearly we are confronted here with a wholly arbitrary claim that can only be explained as an irrational bias in our own favor (Taylor 1981: 216).

However, this human “us” that opponents in this chapter argue on behalf need not necessarily be based on intrinsic biological or intellectual properties, but it could be based on more social aspects of humanity such as our mutual recognition of each other as humans. This is to say that the combination of our cognition and mutual recognition of each other has created a perceived human “us” as an essential aspect of our human consciousness.

While it is certainly true that humans belong to social groups that most animals do not generally gain admission to (largely due to their comparative lack of cognitive ability), all humans are not part of those social groups merely because they are human and any perceived increased human connectedness between myself and a John Davis from New Zealand is misplaced. Having increased interaction with humans outside personal tribes is an aspect of

our survival structure but this doesn't mean we should grant these external humans with a special moral status. The common conception we have is that all of humanity is unified in some way and humans tend to perceive an increased worth of other humans regardless of any lack of relation, as if they are members of the same group or class of mutually morally included beings. Ironically and despite our feelings of mutual moral recognition, the society of the *prevailing human culture* causes the unnecessary suffering of not just animals but of humans around the globe as well. This, I argue, is a sign that the current conception of the "human tribe", of humanity, is paradoxical – this is because humans within the prevailing human culture show little interest in altering their lifestyles for the well-being of humans on the outside of their communities, nations, regions, religions, or wherever it is a person puts up the moral boundary between "us" and "them". If an individual is not willing to compromise for the well-being of other humans then it is not appropriate to consider both people as part of one and the same personal community. For example, a group such as "Americans" can replace their smartphones every 6 months without any consideration for the Congolese people who are displaced and suffer due to the mining of coltan (a rare earth metal) that is used to produce cell phones.

Due to a sudden increase in demand and supply shortage, the price of coltan spiked in late 1999 and early 2000. This caused a "coltan rush", which led to the violent expulsion of many farmers and their families from their land by rebel groups and ruthless businessmen. These forced displacements particularly affected properties where coltan could be found in abundance and in certain cases, slave labor was used in the exploitation of these coltan-rich areas (Molango 2008: 5).

It should be noted, that many if not most westerners may be unaware of the exploitation of the Congolese, however we all have access to this information and even if most westerners were aware of this situation I doubt we would see a dramatic curb in behavior. I use this example because while we may have grown quite accustomed to our shiny new phones, cell phones are not necessary for us to thrive. Sacrificing lower prices and the constant replacement of old phones with new ones in order to reduce the suffering of other humans is not asking for all that much of an individual (although such a change would require dramatic alteration within the industry).

It seems to me the vast majority of humans are perfectly fine with the taking advantage of the suffering of other humans as long as it is done out of sight and out of mind. Indirectly causing and ignoring the suffering of other humans is not characteristic of a unified mutually

recognized ethical human society. If we are truly “one people” benefiting off the suffering of these other humans would be emotionally intolerable. This is to say that Some opponents may try to ground the human prejudice in a concept of a human community, but in order to have something worth calling a human community, there need to be special ties of mutual care and concern. The argument here is that there are no such ties, therefore there isn’t something worth calling a human community on which the human prejudice could be grounded. This should show that the belief in “humanity” as deserving increased moral concern in virtue of being human is paradoxical, as we only seem to adhere to such an ideal when it is convenient for us. This belief is able to preserve our uniqueness and superiority as a species yet we clearly do not apply it to our actual social practices. This is not to say that we are not one community because we sometimes do bad things to one another, but rather we cannot be a single community because the question of caring for a distant or unrelated human being seems to be always an open one – true members of a unified community would at least be disposed to care for one another.

Many ethicists have argued that moral codes are applied to an entity in regards to their “personhood status”. However, the concept of “personhood” is a separate concept from the concept of “humanity” and the human tribe. This thesis is not extending the status of personhood to all members of the ecological community, but instead will argue that the status of personhood does not grant a being with superiority over other creatures. Taylor defines a “person” as, “a center of autonomous choice and valuation. Persons are beings that give direction to their lives on the basis of their own values” (Taylor 1986: 33). Personhood involves a certain type of rational awareness that involves being a moral agent. Ethical codes are designed by “persons” and persons have increased moral obligations because of their personhood. It may also be true that due to their unique interests we have unique responsibilities towards creatures that are persons in order to treat them as ends-in-themselves, however, having the status of personhood does not grant one a special worth and we have no increased moral obligation towards persons because they are persons.

To clarify the claims made in this section: I do not wish to argue that we should not in some sense be morally concerned for distant and unconnected humans. The goal instead is to redefine our moral framework, under more rational ecological grounds, to be concerned with members of our global ecosystem not because they are human (which is irrational) but because

we are mutual members of these interconnected ecosystems. Altering our behavior away from the human prejudice would alleviate the suffering of both the people and the gorillas of the Congo.³

The core idea of this thesis is that our moral relation to the ecosystem should be based on a biological interconnectedness between ourselves and the rest of the ecological community. Taylor describes this interconnection as such:

From the perspective of the biocentric outlook on nature we see human life as an integral part of the natural order of the Earth's biosphere. We thus conceive of the place of humans in the system of nature in the same way we conceive of the place of other species. There is a common relationship to the Earth that we share with wild animals and plants. Full awareness of this common relationship gives us a sense of true community with them (Taylor 1986: 101).

The moral obligations we have to the ecosystem is to treat it as ends-in-themselves whenever possible. Specifically these obligations depend on the goals and interests of individual organisms.

2.2 – Rejecting Arguments for less Dramatic Ideological Changes

I will now address philosophers who defend some form of the human prejudice regardless of accepting the fact that humanity has no intrinsic superiority to non-humans. Opposition arguments here revolve around Bernard Williams who broadly rejects the historically accepted belief in “humanism”— defined as the belief that humans possess an intrinsic or cosmic significance in contrast to everything else. A second opponent in this chapter is Bookchin, who strongly rejects the human right to dominate nature but still reserves a special status for humans. As we will see they support some kind of ideological change – just not to the degree of a complete dismissal of the human prejudice.

First thing to be addressed are arguments made by Williams in his article, “The Human Prejudice”. His core argument is that a human prejudice – a disposition to take into special account the mere fact that someone is a human being – is an ineliminable part of who we are, of our humanity, and this is a significant enough fact, despite humans having no special importance from a cosmic point of view.

³“As some gorillas live on “coltan land”, increasing use of the numbers of mobile phones therefore seems to be destructive to gorilla habitats. Around 2000, a gorilla population was *halved* in one of DR Congo’s national park where coltan was being mined” (Boekhout van Solinge 2008: 11).

Suppose we accept that there is no question of human beings and their activities being important or failing to be so from a cosmic point of view. That does not mean that there is no point of view from which they are important. There is certainly one point of view from which they are important, namely ours. [...] Whether a creature is a human being or not makes a large difference, a lot of the time, to the ways in which we treat that creature or at least think that we should treat it (brackets added) (Williams 2006: 138).

Williams strongly asserts that in no way does this mutually recognized “us” get reduced to the intrinsic superiority of humans:

Now there are some people who suppose that if in any way we privilege human beings in our ethical thought, if we think that what happens to human beings is more important than what happens to other creatures, if we think that human beings as such have a claim on our attention and care in all sorts of situations in which other animals have less or no claim on us, we are implicitly reverting to a belief in the absolute importance of human beings. They suppose that we are in effect saying, when we exercise these distinctions between human beings and other creatures, that human beings are more important, period, than those other creatures. That objection is simply a mistake. We do not have to be saying anything of that sort at all. These actions and attitudes need express no more than the fact that human beings are more important to us, a fact which is hardly surprising (Williams 2006: 139).

Williams argues on behalf of the idea that humanity is a “we” or “us” and that human beings are more important because *we*, as humans, cannot help but viewing ourselves as more important.

In response to Williams, I argue that, first, he seems to be adhering to the idea of humanity as something unified and that all humans are supposedly a part of; however as argued in 2.1, this is a flawed concept that is actually outright contradictory both in mentality and behavior. Second, there is no reason to believe that valuing humans simply in virtue of being human is inherent in being a human; it seems far more likely that such a sensibility is the result of social conditioning. The question, then, is how conceptually ingrained is this human-moral-entity? We can easily imagine human communities that draw such a strict boundary between ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ humans, that they react with total indifference to out-group humans as humans – and not just for reasons of self-defense. There is no evidence to support the claim that *all* humans possess a human prejudice. If the human prejudice has been conditioned in us by society than there is no reason why we cannot be reconditioned to abandon it, especially if doing so is ecologically beneficial and rational.

Williams makes several other arguments that in one way or another defend the human prejudice. The first is largely in response to Peter Singer and his arguments rejecting speciesism. Singer is explicitly focused on the rights of sentient beings – which include all creatures with the capacity to feel, perceive, or experience subjectively. This includes most

animals, although certain animals are believed to lack sentience: “Insects are widely regarded among neuroscientists as incapable of experiences like pain, since they lack the relevant neural structures” (Arico, et al. 2011: 337). The properties Singer argues that are relevant for moral inclusion are the capacity for suffering and enjoyment, entailing that additional “human” properties (e.g. higher cognition, awareness, or language) are not relevant as such. Singer coins the term ‘speciesism’, which he defines as, “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of others species” (Singer 1975: 6). Singer claims that speciesism is of the same nature as racism or sexism. In *Animal Liberation*, Singer asks, “If possessing a higher degree of intelligence does not entitle one human to use another for his or her own end, how can it entitle humans to exploit nonhumans for the same purpose?” (Singer 1975: 7). He continues by claiming:

Racists violate the principle for equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race [...] Similarly, speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. The pattern is identical in each case (Singer 1975, 9).

In response to Singer, Williams argues that speciesism is of an entirely different nature than racism. “If there is a human prejudice, it is structurally different from those other prejudices, racism and sexism” (Williams 2006: 141). Williams asserts that one important difference is the fact that other animals cannot ask for or understand a justification for our prejudice against them. A victim of sexism, for example, demands a rational explanation for her mistreatment. Additionally in reference to animals there is only the question of ‘how we should treat them?’, which Williams argues is entirely different from racism where moral recognition is expected of all parties involved – not just the oppressor (Williams 2006).

My objection to the human prejudice is unharmed by these perceived differences between the human prejudice and other prejudices – the lack of understanding and inability to ask for justification by nonhumans is not relevant for our moral responsibilities towards the ecological community. Even if the human prejudice were different from these other prejudices as Williams claims, my objection remains grounded upon the indefensible concept of the human tribe. An ethical code rejects racism and sexism as they are rationally indefensible and harmful to a healthy community and speciesism too is irrational, philosophically indefensible,

and harmful to our ecological community. Thus, any perceived difference between speciesism and racism is ethically trivial.

Another argument from Williams considers the example of a race of aliens coming to Earth with morally directed intentions. These aliens are cognitively superior to us and objectively benevolent in intentions, but intend to undermine current human norms and values:

They [the aliens] have had much more successful experience than we have in running peaceable societies, and they have found that they need to *run* them, and that too much species-self-assertion or indeed cultural autonomy proves destabilizing and destructive. So, painlessly, they will rid us, certainly of our prejudices, and, to the required extent, of some of our cultural and other peculiarities (brackets added) (Williams 2006: 149).

Williams goes on to raise the stakes of this thought experiment even further:

The benevolent and fair-minded and farsighted aliens may know a great deal about us and our history, and understand that our prejudices are unreformable: that things will never be better in this part of the universe until we are removed. [...]. This, it seems to me, is a place at which the project of trying to transcend altogether the ways in which human beings understand themselves and make sense of their practices could end up. And at this point there seems to be only one question left to ask: Which side are you on? (brackets added) (Williams 2006: 152).

I can in large part respond to this within the arguments I have already made. It is important to recognize, however, that the aliens are external to our ecological community and we need not apply moral concern to them unless we broaden what is included in our ‘ecological’ community – to the solar system, galaxy, etc. (Which we may want to do). Regardless if the aliens pose a threat to the lives and freedoms and other core values (to be defined in the following chapter) held by oneself and one’s personal tribe we can justifiably do anything that is *necessary* to defend our lives and freedoms. If the aliens intend to force sustainability upon us then an argument I make in the next chapter on ecofascism may be relevant. Williams maintains that the question is ‘what side are you on?’ (humanity’s or the morally advanced aliens’) – but when it comes to the threat of ecological collapse there are no sides – we either alter our behavior and attitudes or we go under as a species along with a large portion of our ecological neighbors.

A final point from Williams addresses is the importance of the nature of human values for humans. This is a good transitioning discussion for my next opponent, Bookchin. Williams asserts: “Human values are not just values that we have, but values that express our humanity, and to study them is to study what we value inasmuch as we are what we are, that is to say,

human beings”(Williams 2006: 138). What is being referred to in this discussion on “values” is not merely the existence of values for humans but our cognitive ability to value in itself. Bookchin argues that our very ability to value nature grants us a special status among life forms:

Insofar as human beings alone have an unprecedented capacity to create ethical systems that impart worth to other life-forms, they clearly have a special *worth* in their own right. Insofar as they are capable of being fully conscious of their behavior and its ecological impact (Bookchin 2005: 38-39).

Bookchin goes as far to claim that the nature and beauty of Earth essentially needs humans in order for there to be something to appreciate and value this nature in the first place. This, he argues, grants humans a special worth but he does not believe it follows that this special worth gives us the right to dominate the natural world.

In reply to Bookchin, first, it is far from a settled matter on whether or not certain animals hold the capacity to value aspects of the world, and work in animal cognition and behavioral studies increasingly seems to show that at least some animals seem to have the ability to appreciate some elements of the world (i.e. to value). Second, the true issue under debate here is the claim that being capable of valuing something somehow is something worthy of increased value in itself. In contrast to the claim that these values give humans a special worth I would argue our values gives us special “oughts” but it does not follow that we deserve a special worth. Why, for example, do we not grant birds with superiority due to their ability to fly? Basically the vast cognitive power of the human mind is of no importance to a mushroom or an alligator. Since humans have this capacity to value, it seems to make more sense to use it to its full extent and to value the equal yet vastly different means various species have evolved for survival with the various characteristics of human cognition being but one, especially if doing so is beneficial to our own survival as members of the Earth’s biological community.

In contrast to Bookchin, I see no reason why I cannot recognize myself as an individual, a biological member of the human species, endowed with the gift of incredible cognition and the ability to appreciate beauty in the sublime and tranquil while still denying that any of these things makes me an object of *greater* moral concern than any other creature simply in virtue of me being a human. Not only this but I see no reason to create a moral bubble around myself and other entities with similar identification just because of our

similarities with one another. It may be true that I enter into relationships with these other like-minded humans more easily than anything else but until I have a reason to value them more they are but members of the community of the biosphere that I have no reason to put a special moral status on.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, Bookchin reduces humanity's ecological shortcomings to what he calls "hierarchical mentality", and argues, "The [human] attempt to dominate nature stems from the domination of human by human" (Bookchin 1980: 81). He blames our ecological shortcomings on the development of a hierarchical class system within human communities. Bookchin then continues by stating that, "The ecological crisis of our time is testimony to the fact that the means of production developed by hierarchical society and particularly by capitalism have become too powerful to exist as a means of domination" (Bookchin 1980: 82).

This appeal to the problems of "hierarchical mentalities" is partly in line with my thesis, however, in contrast I would claim that human domination of other humans was not even possible on such a scale until after humans had begun to dominate nature; this is to say that before one tribe of humans could overpower the surrounding tribes, the dominating human tribe must have reduced natural resources to something of a commodity (a means-to-an-end) to be stockpiled, giving them the necessary edge over their competition to not only outcompete but to annihilate, subjugate, and forcibly integrate the competition.

In summary of this chapter, we can see that some of my opponents have accepted the fact that there is no intrinsic superiority of the human species. Williams claims the existence of the human prejudice comes from aspects of our condition as humans who mutually recognize each other as such with the increased value coming from this recognition. Bookchin clearly advocates for radical ecological change both in the structure of society and in our moral sensibilities. These views will, however, fail to initiate and maintain the necessary and lasting mass sustainable changes that would result in a healthy biosphere. Not only this but views that maintain the special worth of humans are philosophically inadequate as they perpetuate a contradictory human tribe united around our identification as humans. To persuade humans to adopt the behavioral changes that both me and Bookchin advocate for, they need to feel emotionally connected, on some ground, to certain aspects of nature, namely the members of our various ecological communities.

Chapter 3: The Transition and the Consequences of Losing the Human Prejudice

This chapter is concerned with the consequences of transitioning from our current paradigm into the biocentric outlook I argue for in this thesis. It will mainly be focused on the predicted positive and negative ethical and political consequences of adopting this new moral sensibility. A large portion will focus on rejecting consequences my opponents may fear are at stake but are either unfounded or inconsequential. The main questions of this chapter will include: How such a change will occur? What are the political and ethical consequences? And can we truly make this shift in our moral sensibilities without losing important “human” values (since many maintain that anthropocentrism is central to our core values)?

3.1 – Consequentialist concerns in the changing of our moral code

A major opponent to this chapter will come from particular consequentialists who argue: The expected costs of abandoning the human prejudice by far outweigh the expected benefits, and may in fact cancel the suggested benefits. These costs, the consequentialist opponent might argue, include human values and the comfort of current lifestyles. Consequentialism in general argues that the morally right act is that which produces the best outcome among those that one can produce, and the morally wrong act is any act which produces less than the best outcome. “The most prominent example is consequentialism about the moral rightness of acts, which holds that whether an act is morally right depends only on the consequences of that act or of something related to that act, such as the motive behind the act or a general rule requiring acts of the same kind” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2015).

Within consequentialism there is disagreement on whether or not we should count the “transition costs” of this change in mindset (in this case the transition is from an anthropocentric to a biocentric moral code). My argument will hold that the transaction cost are of no real concern. To this, the rule-consequentialist, Brad Hooker, can provide support. Hooker defines rule-consequentialism as follows:

Thus, full rule-consequentialism claims that an act is morally wrong if and only if it is forbidden by rules justified by their consequences. It also claims that agents should do their moral decision-making in terms of rules justified by their consequences. And it claims that the conditions under which moral sanctions should be applied are determined by rules justified by their consequences. (Hooker 2015).

Hooker describes the objection in his book, *Ideal Code, Real World*:

So one objection to a code [in this case, a code that rejects the human prejudice] might be that it is so complicated or calls for so much self-sacrifice that too much of society's resources would have to be devoted to getting it widely internalized. The internalization costs would be too high for the code to be optimal (brackets added) (Hooker 2000: 78).

In response to this, Hooker argues:

We should not take into account the costs of getting a code [in this case, a code that rejects the human prejudice] internalized by people who are already committed to some particular code. The cost of getting a non-racist and non-sexist code adopted by people who have internalized racist and sexist rules, for example should *not* be counted (brackets added) (Hooker 2000: 80).

The reason for this, Hooker continues, is because these racist or sexist (or in my case speciesist) rules are unjustifiable and they should not be allowed to “infect rule-consequentialist assessment”. Elsewhere Hooker will argue:

The way to [internalize a new moral code] is to formulate the theory in terms of acceptance by new generations of humans. So we compare the respective “teaching costs” of alternative codes, on the assumption that these codes will be taught to children who have not already been educated to accept a moral code (brackets added) (Hooker 2016).

This last point is of particular importance to this thesis; to the reader, many of the consequences may seem overwhelming and possibly even barbaric and disastrous, but I will argue that is because of the current cultural influences of the prevailing culture that are to be rejected and will not be shared by future generations. So the changes in moral sensibilities are to be ingrained and taught to the younger generations – children whose minds have not yet been conditioned and developed in a human-prejudiced society.

Additionally, due to the very real and immediate threat of ecological collapse described in Chapter 1, the costs of transitioning to this biocentric moral sensibility should be rather insignificant compared to the consequences of keeping the current course with minimal environmentally directed change.

The possibility of the extinction of the human species, a possibility which starkly confronts us in the contemporary world, makes us aware of another respect in which we should not consider ourselves privileged beings in relation to other species. This is the fact that the well-being of humans is dependent upon the ecological soundness and health of many plant and animal communities (Taylor 1981: 208).

One should also recognize that such a dramatic transition would probably be a gradual process that has to slowly reverse thousands of years of contrary conditioning, with each new generation coming closer to the biocentric worldview (while also, hopefully, decreasing and reversing population growth through a rational understanding of the overpopulation phenomenon).

3.2 – A Self-defeating Strategy?

One potential problem of my argument for achieving sustainability is that: abandoning the human prejudice might mean retreating to isolated communities, thus undermining the possibility of cooperation, and thus eventually doing nothing effective to stop and reverse the consequences of unsustainable behavior. If the notion of the human tribe, however faulty, is lost, it seems unlikely that isolated humans can separately maintain the same sustainable behavior and mental ideologies. If there is nothing to hold us together how do humans across the globe maintain a similar ideology concerning ecology?

Perhaps the solution is to change the conception of the human tribe to something more rational and less self-contradictory – all human communities, instead, could be seen as entering into an environmental alliance for mutual benefits. The idea is to replace the contradictory conception of a *human tribe* with that of a *human coalition* (or *ecologically conscious coalition*), that exists for the sole purpose of saving our interconnected ecosystems from ecological degradation and collapse. Consider this:

There existed a large island called *Azgard*. On this island there lived many different tribes who lived largely in isolation from one another – although occasionally they would violate each other's territory and engage in minor violent skirmishes, and at other times they would come together for feasts and intermarriages because they all know that breeding indefinitely within one tribe is unwise to be avoided. Eventually *Azgard* was invaded by an external force that vastly overpowered the beings of a single '*Azgard-ian*' tribe. This force threatened to destroy everything on the island and the tribes realized that they must band together in order to save themselves. The nature of this union did not involve an integration or merging of the tribes, and individuals within each tribe did not start to conceive of an increased value for members of these other tribes. The only union that existed was that they universally acknowledge the source of the problem and they needed the cooperation of all the tribes to stand a chance of overcoming it, after all they are all cognitively aware members of the same threatened ecosystem. The tribes collectively understood the interdependence of their ecosystems and the role each tribe needed to

play in order to maintain it. In this sense they all had the same ideology concerning the events happening on their island, habitat, and ecosystem.

The alliance of these tribes and the mutual conception they had of the external force is similar to how I see the various cultures of humans on Earth and their need to cooperate to solve the environmental crisis. We do not extend *increased* moral worth to the members of these other cultures but we all collectively understand the threat and we need each other to think and behave with a similar mindset if our island (Earth) is going to persist in a way that allows us to thrive. We are connected not by our humanity but by the connection each of our ‘tribes’ has to the common biosphere, and by the reciprocal awareness of such connection. My argument in this section is that it is possible for us to preserve a mutual understanding of responsibility toward the biosphere without the preservation of this human tribe.

3.3 – Ethical costs

The ethical consequences are most likely among the most significant worries for my opponents. I am, after all, talking about a paradigm shifting change within the structure of morality – since at the very dawn of Western thought, ethics has been indisputably human-centered. “Ethical significance belonged to the direct dealing of man with man, including the dealing with himself: all traditional ethics is anthropocentric” (Jonas 1984: 4).

The most significant fear that opponents may have is that such a change will in fact cause the loss of many of our core values. I of course argue otherwise, but regardless I need to determine what these *core* values include. Our *core values* are the aspects of our lives that are needed in order to create the conditions under which there is a possibility of living a happy and *fulfilled* life. We cannot of course pretend to have a comprehensive list of all the essential values we self-conscious beings hold near and dear, however, on the shortlist of core ‘human’ values I include: (i) experiencing and maintaining close and meaningful relationships with other beings; the mutual support an individual receives and gives to the communities one identifies with; (ii) The experience and expression of one’s freedom. The freedom that exists as a core value for self-conscious beings who are aware of the concept of freedom is the internal feeling of being in control of our lives and where they are going. Our freedom involves having the ability to participate in the formulation of our futures. To help grasp freedom as a core value I will appeal to the *capabilities approach*, described here:

The capability approach is a theoretical framework that entails two core normative claims: first, the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance, and second, that freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value (Robeyns 2016).

Essentially the freedom that is reduced to a core value for humans is the *freedom of choice* – which in and of itself, is of direct importance to one's quality of life. However it should be added that one's desire to preserve freedom of choice is not only directed at the self but also includes the members of one's personal tribe. (iii) The final core value I assert is the preservation of art and innovation, as our condition as freedom seeking self-conscious beings pushes us to express ourselves and relate life to others in creative and meaningful ways (i.e. through art, music, innovation, etc.). This includes the human drive to create, innovate, and express themselves, not just through traditional art but through the creation of 'technology' as well. Our values go beyond merely meeting the demands of survival, we have to find meaningful reasons for us to live lives that we internally consider worth living.

The objection, then, is the claim that without a human prejudice operating within our moral sensibilities, we would undermine all or some of the values listed above. If this is the case, then my thesis is in danger of collapse as what I am asking would destroy our purpose for living.

However, it is my intent to show that the loss of the human prejudice does not involve the loss of our core values. I maintain that we can preserve our meaningful relationships, express our freedoms, and appreciate our unique accomplishments in art and technology without the persistence of an anthropocentric outlook. We can find support in this statement from Cora Diamond:

Moral concern is something we have not as rational beings nor as animals with certain capacities but as members of communities within which this or that language or moral deliberation has taken shape, and within which there are various uses of 'we', 'us' (contrasting with 'them'), expressive of solidarity with fellow members of a community (Diamond 2008: 39).

This is to say that our valuing of others comes from the moral relations we have with members of our community and not because they are human but because there exists an emotional solidarity. The core values are not in danger, because they can be still supported from within human communities (in the plural), where the "us" is not "us as human beings" but more like

the "us" of the personal tribes defined in Chapter 2. However, I should clarify that these personal communities while usually and necessarily are human composed they do not have to be – humans can enter into intimate personal tribes with nonhumans (e.g. dog companions).

Bookchin makes an argument that is appropriate to address here concerning the human perceived “otherness” of humans from nonhumans. He argues that our whole self-conscious existence is dependent on our understanding of humans as something “other” from nonhumans.

Human beings at some point has to at least begin to see first nature generally as an “other” if their self-identity and self-consciousness as human beings were to emerge. [...] In order for human beings to differentiate themselves in natural evolution, there must be duality, such as dualities between self and other and between human and nonhuman (brackets added) (Bookchin 2005: 48).

In reply to Bookchin, I agree that we do need to have concepts of the self and the other for our self-consciousness to exist as it does, and it may also be true that without the sense of 'otherness' we wouldn't be able to maintain our core values. However, it does not follow that preserving this sense of “otherness” requires making a moral distinction between man and animal, nor does it follow that recognizing oneself as an “other” is the same as placing a special worth on oneself.

In short, arguments that assert that our core values depend on maintaining the human prejudice are philosophically inadequate. So while some claim that preserving human values requires the valuing of humans as something superior in some regard to non-humans, my argument suggests instead that human values can be preserved while rejecting the perceived superior value of humans. While historically it may be true that the expression of our core values went along with unsustainable behavior, I have argued here that such values can be promoted also within a non-human-prejudiced, and thus sustainable, way of life.

While talking about ethical costs, it seems appropriate to ask: how will our new moral sensibilities transfer over into our day to day interactions with various humans and nonhumans? It is at this point that I will separate myself most starkly from the cosmic egalitarian, the biocentrism of Paul Taylor, and the utilitarianism of Peter Singer. Readers may ask: ‘Is killing a mosquito that has landed on oneself just as morally reprehensible as murdering a human stranger?’ The answer is complex: yes, the mosquito in principle is to be valued just as much as a unrelated human. Some biocentrics (who depend on the concept of

intrinsic value to all living creatures) may advocate for the avoidance of such an act of killing a mosquito. Instead I argue that we need to recognize the cruel reality of the world and the fact life kills other life that is in its way or violates its space. I feel justified killing an insect that is using me as prey, but I also recognize the severity of my decision to kill that insect. Now while John Davis from New Zealand is just as valuable to me as the mosquito, there is no moral justification for my killing of him until he attacks me with a syringe in an attempt to steal my blood.

Since the inherent value of life argued for by my biocentric cohorts is not present in my argument, my theory can justify the murder of a mosquito that has bitten me or a wasp that has stung my child. It also allows me to withhold moral concern from lifeforms that are not connected to our ecosystems in the appropriate manner – such as viruses which are not members of our ecological community in the way plants, animals, and fungi are and cannot truly be considered part of the “unified web of interconnected organisms”. To truly be included as part of this interconnected web an entity must be affected by the ecosystem and its various members and also must have an effect on the ecosystem. Humans for example are both dependent on and can harm or complement nature depending on our actions.

Furthermore, the existence of the personal tribe in my framework, allows me to justify preferential treatment to certain beings due to their relation to me while Singer and Taylor would advocate for a more egalitarian framework. This ties back to preserving our values and the above quote from Diamond, in that my biocentrism does not require equal moral responsibility for all life or all members of the ecological community – moral concern is justifiably directed more intensely at the entities one subjectively and *rationaly* values more which, I believe, should be taken as an obvious fact of life.

Another question may be whether vegetarianism is a consequence of the new biocentric moral sensibility. More broadly the question here is whether there is increased moral concern for certain lifeforms (such as sentient beings). Singer’s animal ethics will certainly be in support of vegetarianism and defend “sentientism”. Singer argues that plants do not have ‘interests’ and do not experience ‘pain’ or ‘pleasure’ and thus should not be objects of moral concern (Singer 1975).

I do not, however, believe vegetarianism is required. Realistically, meat consumption will necessarily be dramatically reduced as cultivating meat has a much larger impact on the

ecosystem and the factory-farm will certainly be categorically rejected. A complete switch to vegetarianism in self-sustaining communities, however, is not necessary. We can speculate that in a sustainable society the majority of food come from locally based sources and most local communities can only grow certain types of plants with a limited range of nutritional value. Scandinavians are probably not going to have a seemingly unlimited supply of fresh pineapple in January. To clarify, keeping commercial relations between continents would still be theoretically possible, but realistically the amount of energy and resources needed to supply adequate food across continents is impractical; also, areas that grow high-demand foods, like pineapple, probably could no longer justify the sacrificing of so much of their own habitat in order to supply food to external communities. So it's reasonable to assume that trans-continental food exchange will decrease significantly in a sustainable global economy. Proper nutrition, I would argue, is a necessary condition for sustaining the core values listed above. If one lives a sustainable lifestyle with a balanced nutrition – say in the North Georgia Appalachian Mountains – deer is on the menu. Deer are abundant in north Georgia and provide nutrients that local plants do not.

Unlike Singer's ethical theory, this thesis has no concern with the so-called 'sentience' of a species – plants play just as important a role in the balance of ecosystems and in my theory there really is no moral difference in the value of a plant and an animal (although what is morally required of us towards different lifeforms is obviously subject to variation). Also contrary to Singer's claim, I would argue plants and fungi do have interests, perhaps not in a relatable human sense, but they do exist to survive and respond positively and negatively to environmental stimuli or as Taylor says, "are teleological (goal-oriented) centers of life" (Taylor 1986: 45). I should also clarify that the preservation of biodiversity (as argued in chapter 1) is of paramount concern – so the life of an endangered gorilla is of more concern than a common pine tree... or human for that matter.

Some opponents of biocentrism (e.g. Bookchin) base their opposition on a perceived threat biocentrism poses to the valuing of our human achievements. Bookchin refers to biocentric views as "mystic ecology" and represent views that despise all the creations of humanity (e.g. technology) as transgressions against the "Earth Goddess":

The insidious devaluation of human achievements promoted by mystical ecologies is accompanied by a hatred of all that is specifically human: a hatred of reason, science, art, and technological innovation in almost all its forms. (Bookchin 2005: 39).

However, biocentrics do not *have* to claim anything of the sort. While there is a lot ingrained in this human culture to despise, our innovation and use of technology and appreciation for the arts are not necessarily among them. There is no reason why humans cannot continue in their appreciation of art and academia as well as developing technologically while also maintaining a biocentric ideology that does not grant special privileges to humans because they are part of a special class that other lifeforms are excluded from.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, humans need to feel just as much moral obligation towards other members of the ecological community as they do toward other humans – to recognize the “natural freedoms” of living things as part of one’s own fulfillment as a morally driven consciousness. The internalization of these ecological sensibilities will result in positive social change within our communities and may very well help us in the flourishing of the core values I described above.

3.4 – Political Costs

In addition to the ethical costs of the abandoning the human prejudice, there might also be fears of dramatic political costs. Any reformation of society to be sustainable will require serious (perhaps revolutionary) change in our political structure. Many of these political changes, such as the collapse of hierarchical society, I will argue are actually beneficial. Others, such as the risk of ecofascism is avoided by the voluntary adoption of a new moral sensibility.

A consequence some may fear in the face of sustainable advocacy is the perceived threat of ecofascism. Ecofascism is defined by environmental historian, Michael Zimmerman, as “a totalitarian government that requires individuals to sacrifice their interests to the well-being and glory of the 'land', understood as the splendid web of life, or the organic whole of nature, including peoples and their states” (Zimmerman 531: 2008). However, my theory is designed specifically to avoid such undesirable political consequences. Despite the ecological need for this new mentality, the need for sustainability alone is not enough to justify our culture’s abandonment of the *human prejudice*. This goes back to “saving the world” not just from us but for us. As already argued, there would be no point in saving this world if humans

are forced to sacrifice their essential values. If the goal was merely to save the world from the behavior of humans then we need only fling ourselves off a cliff or to impose some sort of ban on reproduction. The whole point of sustainability is to save *a world worth living in*. If human culture was to attain a sustainable state by implementing an ecofascist regime, humans would lose their freedom to act and make decisions, and any sort of existential fulfilment or Aristotelian *flourishing* would be destroyed.

Fears of ecofascism aside, internalizing this new biocentric moral code will have some rather significant consequences to the political structure of our society. As already hinted at by both Bookchin and myself earlier in the thesis, many elements of hierarchical society will no longer be a viable means of governing as the current hierarchical structure is a major contributor to our ecological degradation. In abandoning the hierarchical structure to society there is one change that I believe is of particular importance which can be referred to as the “lock and stock” tendency developed along with hierarchical mentality which is probably associated with the evolution of communal property into private and state property. What is being referred to here is the practice of keeping food resources under ‘lock and key’ meaning the government or leadership of the society keeps food resources locked away from the community. So ‘food’ is treated as a commodity – a means to gain wealth to be exchanged for labor instead of a basic ‘right’ for members of the community in the way access to clean water and air is. This is not to reject the practice of exchanging labor for food – what must be abandoned is the use of food as a means to force lower classes of the community to work and produce excessively for those who hold the key to the food supply. This is why in modern society lower classes continue to have to work excessive hours to make ends meet despite the technological advancements of automation of much of the work that was once done by hand.

It might be helpful to show how this gradual transformation may take place through actual real world examples. Today not all human communities can be easily categorized as part of the prevailing human culture or as an isolated community. There are some tribes that interact regularly with the prevailing human culture and are partly shaped by it but still maintain ethical sensibilities that are partial towards the views I present in this thesis. Tribes in such a gray area are good examples of humans moving towards the desired outlook. One example is the Whanganui tribe (a specific tribe within the cultural group known as the Māori People) of New Zealand who view certain parts of nature as part of their own community. This

tribe recently won a court case granting the Whanganui river the legal status of a living entity. The tribe identifies the river as an ancestor and an indivisible whole which suggests a very non-anthropocentric mentality. However the tribe obviously worked within the parameters of the prevailing human culture in order for their river to get legal “person status” (Roy 2017). Encouraging this sort of internalization and recognition is an example of how our society can begin to gradually change itself into sustainable biocentric communities. This court case is the first of its kind, but we should try to normalize such events along with the moral internalizations present in Māori culture and gradually improve upon them.

As for wider political changes, it is hard to pinpoint how exactly governments and nations will change, but it's safe to assume that “the nation” in its current form will change dramatically, especially in a place like the United States where there will no longer be an increased connection between members merely because they are humans living within the same imaginary borders thus destroying nationalism. In addition to these political costs there will be numerous economic, health, and infrastructure costs. These costs could include costs to medicine, warfare, global economy, technology, police, as well as many others but since they largely have no bearing on the philosophical argument and can only be speculated on at this point so I will leave them as further questions to be addressed outside this thesis.

3.5 – The Remaining Moral Questions and the Advancement of Ethical Theories

I have argued that biocentrism, the defense of human core values, and the importance of personal tribes are all part of the new ethical outlook, but this general framework still leaves many moral questions open. There is still the problem of developing new ethical theories around this new outlook. I would argue that individuals need to determine what actions are *necessary* to preserve the lives and freedoms of the personal tribe: what *must* one kill? What *must* one cause suffering to? The question that remains is – what *is* necessary? For me this depends on the particular circumstance and the particular individuals involved in the moments when action is required and moral questions are asked. However, the war between different ethical theories (e.g. Kantian, Aristotelian, etc.) will wage on, only with a new moral sensibility that includes the entire ecological community.

The human prejudice, then, and any concept of humans deserving special rights based on their biology, communicative ability, or some other ability must be abandoned and replaced

by an ideology of *ecological equity* (whether a person is motivated by reason and science or spirit and mysticism). The philosophies of Williams, Bookchin and Singer could serve as important stepping stones in the gradual adoption of biocentrism. Adopting an attitude towards all other life as an *end-in-itself* – to recognize the natural freedom of the other members of the biological community – is the needed force for autonomously motivating a sustainable change in behavior. While there may be no intrinsic value of life, my life and the lives of my tribe members matter to me, and these lives are dependent on the ecological community as a whole which I am also a member of, and must therefore treat as a moral object. It should be mentioned though that increased ‘rights’ of personal tribes only entails the increased right and obligation to protect their lives and essential freedoms, which should not interfere with the ability to act sustainably. We could refer to this view as an *Existential Biocentrism* – as it is an ethical theory that argues for the equal moral inclusion of all living members of the ecological community despite acknowledging that their may every well be no significant value to life in contrast to non living matter. Moral distinctions based on membership to humanity are irrational, not because of an objective equal worth of life, but because the ecological community exists and a global human community does not.

Our condition as ‘self-conscious’ beings means that our motivations and adaptations come through ideological changes in mindset – this is how we adapt as a community; and this is how, I believe, we may find a way to continue to survive and flourish alongside our ecological neighbors even in the face of the environmental challenges we face today due to the unregulated actions of generations of humans within the prevailing human culture.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to argue first that there exists serious and urgent ecological problems caused by human behavior, and further, argue the best means of achieving sustainability and solving this ecological crisis is through the internalization of a biocentric moral code that values all members of the ecological community as ends-in-themselves. The importance of doing so is to achieve and maintain sustainability while preserving our core values which are reduced to freedom, meaningful relationships, and the expression of ourselves through art and innovation. The analysis of the human prejudice shows it is philosophically inadequate.

In chapter 1, I describe the circumstances of the ecological crisis and show it is indeed caused by the actions of the prevailing human culture. I then reject arguments that assert the ecological problems can be solved within human-centered ethics that look for solutions within economic changes or cost-benefit analysis as well as all views that maintain the humanistic biblical conception of land. I conclude the chapter by claiming a change in our moral sensibilities towards nature must take place.

Chapter 2 explains the nature of the ambiguous moral concept of the human. The main objective of the chapter is to show that the human prejudice is philosophically unsupportable and furthermore must be eliminated from our moral code if we wish to achieve a desirable state of sustainability. The opponents in this chapter recognize the shortcomings of traditional anthropocentric thought but still maintain a human prejudice that grants special worth to human entities is defensible or necessary.

Chapter 3 addresses the perceived costs of adopting this new moral code. I first argue that we need not include the transition costs of doing so due to the fact that they are to be gradual and largely inconsequential compared to the threat of ecological collapse. I formulate how we may maintain a global ethical understanding of ecological concern without the preservation of a global human tribe. I then address concerns of the ethical costs of internalizing a biocentric moral code; here I address perhaps the main concern of the chapter and maintain that it is possible to preserve our core values without being possessed by a human prejudice. I also address political costs of my theory and dismiss fears of ecofascism, while also recognizing the necessary collapse of hierarchical society and the modes of

production that developed alongside it. Lastly I recognize that ethical debates will carry on and difficult moral questions will continue to plague our thoughts.

One remaining question is how do we best encourage the internalization of this new moral code? Should it be through hard reason, evolution and scientific understanding? Or should it come from a more sentimental place and appeal to an emotional connection to the interconnectedness of nature as Taylor suggests? It may be true that members of our culture are irrational in how they interpret evidence, which certainly supports many currently held irrational beliefs held by flat-earth theorists, dinosaur deniers, and Adam and Eve creationists – which are overturned by the most rudimentary logical arguments and scientific evidence.

Adopting a mindset that sees all lifeforms in our biological community as ends and themselves and to have their natural freedoms flourish should initiate the necessary behavioral changes that could very well save our quickly declining habitat which has become the biosphere of Earth. A whole new world will be opened to the unborn generations, one that will hopefully grant them the happiness and fulfillment that is so painfully lacking for so many in today's materialistic and anthropocentric society. Our new sustainable society should redefine the concept of wealth within communal well-being, and appreciation for nature will be an inherent aspect of our lifestyles. We are moral and rational beings by our very nature and when we apply our morality to the world in a way that is both rational and practical we should recognize our position as an equal member of the ecological community known as the biosphere of Earth.

Abstract

Chapter I will, using scientific research, explain the nature of the environmental crisis and show that it is indeed caused by what I refer to as the *prevailing human culture*. Key concepts used in this thesis will be defined (such as ecology and prevailing human culture). I will reject views that do not think the current human moral sensibility is the problem concerning the environment. Various opposition arguments will defend the current conservative moral boundary between humans and nature, including M. Sagoff's artificialist proposal. Also, solutions in terms of a human-centered cost-benefit analysis along with the "Abrahamic" conception of human dominance over nature will be rejected.

Chapter II will focus on the philosophical inadequacies of the human prejudice in all its forms. I will argue mainly against opponents who reject 'humanism' but wish to preserve some sort of human moral privilege or status. The chapter will address the ambiguity of the moral inclusion of being "human" to which D. McNaughton and P. Taylor provide talking points. I will reject B. Williams's concept of the human "us" thus arguing it is an irrational belief adopted by the *prevailing human culture*. Another opponent for this chapter is M. Bookchin who places a special status on humans based on the human capacity to value. I will also criticize Bookchin's claims that "mystical" biocentric notions belittle and demonize human achievements.

Chapter III will address the ethical and political consequences of internalizing a biocentric moral code and argue against those who believe the consequences are too steep. While they may seem costly to us that is only because we still have the mindset of the prevailing human culture which will not exist in future generations. Opponents in the chapter include consequentialists who argue there's more 'good' in maintaining the human prejudice, as well as all those who defend anthropocentric society. I will maintain that the core values defined in this thesis can be preserved and progressed without anthropocentrism.

Bibliography

Arico, A., Fiala, B., Goldberg, R., and Nichols, S. (2011). "The Folk Psychology of Consciousness". *Mind & Language*, Vol. 26, no.3. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, pp. 327-352.

Boekhout van Solinge, T. (2008). "Crime, Conflicts and Ecology in Africa", in Tanghild Sollund (eds), *Global Harms: Ecological Crime and Speciesism*. Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Bookchin, M. (1980). "Toward an Ecological Society", Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Bookchin, M.. (2005). *The Ecology of Freedom: The emergence and dissolution of hierarchy*. AK Press, UK.

Brennan, A., and Lo, Y. "Environmental Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ethics-environmental/>>. (Viewed 27/01/2017).

Ceballos, G. (2015) "Accelerated modern human-induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction". *Science Advances*: Vol. 1, no. 5.

Chagnon, M. (2008). "Causes and effects of the worldwide decline in pollinators and corrective measures. Canadian Wildlife Federation". Quebec Regional Office.

Diamond, Cora. (2008). "The Importance of Being Human", in Cockburn, D (eds). *Human Beings*. Cambridge University Press: NY, pp 35-62.

Dirzo, R. (2003). "Global State of Biodiversity and Loss". *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.* 2003. 28:137–67. University of Michigan.

Dukes, J.S. (2011). "Responses of invasive species to a changing climate and atmosphere", in: Richardson, D.M. *Fifty Years of Invasion Ecology: The Legacy of Charles Elton*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Encyclopædia Britannica. "Ecosystem". Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. September 04, 2015. <<https://www.britannica.com/science/ecosystem>>. (Viewed March 17, 2017).

Faith, Daniel., "Biodiversity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/biodiversity/>>. Viewed 17.3.2017.

Geht, S. (1996). "The Human Population Problem: Educating and Changing Behavior". *Conservation Biology*, Vol. 10, No. 3. Published by: Wiley for Society for Conservation Biology, pp. 900-903.

Holdren, J., and Ehrlich, P. (1974). "Human Population and the Global Environment: Population growth, rising per capita material consumption, and disruptive technologies have made civilization a global ecological force". *American Scientist*. Vol. 62, No. 3, pp. 282-292.

Holechek, J. (2007). "National Security and Rangelands: Depletion of Fossil Fuels and Global Warming Could Drastically Reduce World Food Production. Conserving and Improving Rangelands Is Important, Because They Likely Will Play an Increased Role in Meeting World Food Needs". Society for Range Management. *Rangelands*, Vol. 29, No. 5, pp. 33-38.

Hooker, B. (2000). *Ideal Code, Real World*. Oxford University Press: NY.

Hooker, Brad, "Rule Consequentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/consequentialism-rule/>>. (viewed 12.04.2017)

Jonas, H. (1985). *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. The University of Chicago Press (London).

Javeline, D., Hellmann, J., Cornejo, R and Shufeldt, G. (2013). "Expert Opinion on Climate Change and Threats to Biodiversity". *BioScience*, Vol. 63, No. 8. Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, pp. 666-673.

Jordan, R. (2015). "Stanford researcher declares that the sixth mass extinction is here." *Stanford University News*. <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2015/june/mass-extinction-ehrllich-061915.html>. (Viewed 22.01.2017).

Krieger, M. (2002). "Whats Wrong with Plastic Trees?", in Schemidtz, D., and Willott, E. (eds), *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*. Oxford University Press, Inc, New York, pp. 159-171.

Leopold, Aldo (1949). *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford University Press, New York.

McLean, D. (2010) "Is "Human Being" a Moral Concept?". *Philosophy & Public Policy Quarterly*. VOL. 30, NO. 3/4.

McNaughton, D. (1991). "The Importance of Being Human", in Cockburn, D. *Human Beings*. Cambridge University Press (UK), pp 63-81.

Miller, R. (2006). *Native America, Discovered And Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, And Manifest Destiny*. Praeger, London.

Molango, M. (2008). "'Blood Diamond" to "Blood Coltan": Should International Corporations Pay the Price for the Rape of the DR Congo?". *Inter American University of Puerto Rico*.

New World Encyclopedia contributors, "Bushmen," *New World Encyclopedia*, <<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Bushmen&oldid=1002073>> (accessed March 17, 2017).

Nicole, H.(2010). "The Anthropocentric Advantage". Carnegie Mellon University. Research Showcase @ CMU Department of Philosophy Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Pauly, D., Christensen, V., Dalsgaard, J., Froese, R., and Torres, F. (1998). "Fishing Down Marine Food Webs". *Science* 279, 860; DOI: 10.1126/science.279.5352.860.

Robeyns, Ingrid, "The Capability Approach", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/capability-approach/>> (viewed 15.04.2017).

Roy, E,A. New Zealand river granted same legal rights as human being. *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being>>. (viewed March 17, 2017).

Sagoff, M. (1974). "On Preserving the Natural Environment". *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 84, No. 2., The Yale Law Journal Company, Inc, pp. 205-267.

Sagoff, M. (1981). "Economic Theory and Environmental Law". *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. 79, No. 7. The Michigan Law Review Association, pp. 1393-1419.

Singer, P (1975). *Animal Liberation*. HarperCollins Publishing, New York.

Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, "Consequentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/consequentialism/>>. (viewed 10.04.17).

Schieffelin, E. (1985). "The Cultural Analysis of Depressive Affect: An Example from New Guinea", in Kleinman, A., and Good, B (eds), *Culture and Depression: Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder*. Univeristy of California Press., Los Angeles, pp 101-133.

Taylor, B. and Zimmerman, M. (2005). "Deep Ecology", in B. Taylor, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature*, London: Continuum.

Taylor, P. (1981). "The Ethics of Respect for Nature", *Environmental Ethics*, 3, pp.197–218.

Taylor, P. (1989). *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

United States Environmental Protection Agency. "Learn About Sustainability". Last updated October 18, 2016. <<https://www.epa.gov/sustainability/learn-about-sustainability#what>>. (Viewed March 17, 2017).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2017). In a race against extinction, rusty patched bumble bee is listed as endangered. <<https://www.fws.gov/midwest/news/861.html>>. (viewed 29.01.2017).

Williams, B. (2006). "The Human Prejudice". *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*. Edited by A.W. Moore. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, pp 135-155.

Zimmerman, Michael E. (2008). "Eco-Fascism", in Bron Taylor (eds), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, Continuum International Publishing Group, pp. 531-532.

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public

I, Jeffrey Daniel Gardner,

1. herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to:
 - 1.1. reproduce, for the purpose of preservation and making available to the public, including for addition to the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright, and
 - 1.2. make available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright,

“The Human Prejudice and the Problem of Sustainability”,

supervised by Francesco Orsi,

2. I am aware of the fact that the author retains these rights.
3. I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe the intellectual property rights or rights arising from the Personal Data Protection Act.

Tartu, **15.05.2017**