The Moral Status of Animals:

ETHICAL CROSSROADS, DEAD ENDS AND THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

by Nancy O'Sullivan *

If ethical thinking is an evolutionary process, as Aldo Leopold, the father of modern environmental ethics, thought it was,[1] then today we stand at a crossroads in that discipline. Or is it instead, a dead end? For thousands, if not tens-of-thousands of years, human beings have despotically ruled the rest of the animal kingdom. Believing ourselves to be superior, other species were categorized as existing "merely as a means to an end,"[2] a human end, that is. Animals, other than humans, held no moral status.[3]

Amidst growing lists of extinct and endangered species, this view has been philosophically attacked with increasing vigor since the 1970's. It brings into play the question of what the status of animals is, as well as what the role of humanity is in its relationship to them. This paper will examine these questions from the ethical standpoint of three current theories which attempt to establish the moral status of animals. It will argue that: traditional ethical foundations, as expressed in Tom Regan's rights view and Peter Singer's utilitarian theory, cannot be logically extended to include animals, based as they are, on atomistic and anthropocentric starting points; and that, although the holistic approach of Aldo Leopold attempts to break new ethical ground, the radical shift in thinking it entails, carries us beyond the realm of ethics altogether.

"Ethical theories attempt to specify what 'the right reasons' are for judging acts right, wrong and obligatory."[4] This seems a simple enough statement, but there is so much disagreement on the foundations for an ethical theory as it applies to non-humans, that the task of finding one appears doomed from the start. Tom Regan, for example, upholds a rights view and bases his theory on considered beliefs or reflective intuition:

> We are to begin by considering our pre-reflective intuitions--those beliefs about right and wrong that we happen to have. We then make a conscientious effort to make the best review of these judgments we can, and we do this by striving to purge our thoughts of inconsistency and unquestioned partiality, and by thinking as rationally and coolly as we can, with maximum conceptual clarity and on the basis of the best relevant information we can muster. Those moral beliefs we hold after we have made an honest effort to meet these requirements are our considered beliefs, our reflective intutions, and any ethical theory that fails to match our considered beliefs, in a broad range of cases, cannot be reasonably judged the best theory, all considered.[5]

Peter Singer, however, disagrees with this position: "Our moral convictions are not reliable data for testing ethical theories. We should work from sound theories to practical judgments, not from our judgments to our theories."[6] His utilitarian position is based on the principle of equality: "...the interests of every being that has interests are to be taken into account and treated equally with the like interests of any other being."[7]

These positions both follow from traditional ethical starting points. Others, such as those proposed by Paul Taylor and Aldo Leopold attempt to forge new paths in ethical theory and to establish the moral status of animals within a wider context. Taylor[8] broadens his scope to include all living things and bases his theory on an attitude of respect for life:

> ...the biocentric outlook recommends itself as an acceptable system of concepts and beliefs to anyone who is clearminded, unbiased, and factually enlightened, and who has a developed capacity of reality awareness with

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> regard to the lives of individual organisms. This, I submit, is as good a reason for making the moral commitment involved in adopting the attitude of respect for nature as any theory of environmental ethics could possibly have.[9]

Aldo Leopold's 'Land Ethic' similarly embraces the entire 'biotic community,' but it goes even further by requiring a fundamental shift in thinking. Commenting on Leopold's book **A Sand County Almanac**, John Rodman says of the 'Land Ethic':

> ...we cannot simply abstract from the last part of this carefully-composed book the notion of extending ethics to the land and its inhabitants. The land ethic emerges in the course of the book as an integral part of a sensibility developed through observation, participatory experience, and reflection. It is an 'ethic' in the almost forgotten sense of a 'way of life'. For this reason it would be pretentious to talk of a land ethic until we have let our curiosity follow the skunk as it emerges from hibernation, listened with wonder at the calls of the wild geese arriving at the pond, sawed the fallen ancient tree while meditating its history, shot a wolf (once) and looked into its eyes as it died, recognized the fish in ourselves, and strained to see the world from the perspective of a muskrat eye-deep in the swamp only to realize that in the end the mind of the muskrat holds for us a mystery we cannot fathom.[10]

Essentially, the theories offered for the moral status of animals fall into two camps--those that follow traditional ethics, and those that do not. The traditional positions of rights and utilitarianism tend to focus on the animals themselves, in an attempt to fit them into ethical structures designed for human beings; while those of thinkers like Taylor and Leopold focus attention on our thinking and attempt to create new ethical frameworks designed to encompass a wider understanding of our application of moral status for animals and for the environment generally. In order to assess the relative merits and difficulties of such theories, and to determine their viability, a closer examination of the fundamental arguments in Regan, Singer and Leopold will follow.

The theory that human beings possess certain natural and inalienable rights (such as rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness) gained wide acceptance at the time of the French and American revolutions and as a result were embodied in their constitutions. It remains today even more widely accepted, as is implied in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.[11]

If it can be established that animals have natural rights in the same way human beings have, then it follows that we have certain obligations and duties toward them. If, for example, the chicken in my coop has a right to life in the same way my neighbours have, then I am obliged not to kill that chicken and eat it for dinner, just as I am obliged not to kill my neighbours and make a meal of them.

The question, however, of whether or not human beings truly possess natural or moral rights (no matter how widely accepted) is itself a difficult one. Philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham argue that the right to life and other rights are legal rights. The existence of moral or natural rights "is simple nonsense; natural and imprescriptable rights, rhetorical nonsense--nonsense upon stilts."[12]

Nevertheless, those who support the popular view (influenced largely by Immanuel Kant) that "all persons (that is all rational, autonomous individuals) have a distinctive kind of value, a unique worth or dignity,"[13] believe that rights exist for individuals based on their nature as such:

> ...moral rights follow directly from our recognition of persons as direct objects of moral concern, as entities worthy of moral consideration, as loci of intrinsic value, or, in Kant's terminology, as ends in themselves... human beings have moral rights in virtue of being moral objects, these rights follow from their nature...[14]

Moral rights, therefore, belong to moral agents by virtue of the fact that they have unique inherent value.

The case for animal rights, as Tom Regan argues it in **The Case For Animal Rights**, attempts to place (at least some) animals within this moral framework. Regan chooses a rights view because in his mind it best meets with the requirements for a valid ethical theory, that is, it conforms with our institutions, and

(1) systematizes the maximum num-

> ber of our considered beliefs, thereby having maximum scope; (2) systematizes them in a coherent fashion, thereby achieving consistency; (3) does this without compromising the degree of precision it is reasonable to expect and require of any moral principle(s); (4) and satisfies these other criteria of evaluation while making the fewest possible assumptions necessary to do so, thereby meeting the criteria of simplicity.[15]

The task for Regan is to demonstrate that animals, like humans, are objects of moral concern and therefore possess basic moral rights. His rights view states that all moral agents and patients have moral rights which are natural, inalienable, universal and equal.[16] Hence, the first several chapters of Regan's book are devoted to establishing animals as moral patients. A moral patient is distinct from a moral agent in that the latter is capable of performing right or wrong acts as well as experiencing the consequences of others' actions. Normal adult human beings are moral agents. Moral patients, however, can neither do right or wrong, but they can be on the receiving end of the actions of moral agents.[17] Very young children and mentally handicapped individuals are examples of moral patients. "We have reason to regard" these humans, Regan argues, "as...moral patient[s] on all fours, so to speak, with animals."[18]

The establishment of animals as moral patients is arrived at by way of a rather thorough examination of their mental lives, which concludes that at least some animals (mammalian animals of a year or more) have fairly complex and sophisticated mental lives as well as experiential lives, comparable in many ways to those of human beings:

> Both animals and humans have preference--and welfare--interests, some biological, some psychological, some social: both are capable of acting intentionally in pursuit of what they want; both may be benefitted or harmed and, if the latter, harmed either because of what they are made to experience (harms as inflictions) or because of what they are denied (harms as deprivations); both have lives that are characterized by pleasure or pain, satisfaction or frustration; and the overall tone or quality of the life of each, to a greater or lesser degree, is a function of the harmonious satisfaction of those preferences that it is in the interests of each to have satisfied.[19]

The argument following from this must determine whether or not moral patients are owed duties or obligations by moral agents directly. This involves Regan in showing that the principle that it is wrong to harm an object of moral concern, whether agent or patient, conforms with our reflective intuitions. It is wrong to harm animals because as moral patients they possess inherent value. "If...we postulate inherent value in the case of moral agents, then we cannot non-arbitrarily deny it of moral patients."[20]

This postulate, however, needs theoretical support which is offered by the 'subject-of-a-life criterion':

> Individuals are subjects of a life if they are able to perceive and remember; if they have beliefs, desires, and preferences; if they are sentient and have an emotional life; if they have a sense of their own future; if they have a psychological identity over time; and if they have an individual experiential welfare that is logically independent of their utility for, and the interests of, others.[21]

Animals as understood according to Regan's analysis of them clearly meet this criterion and therefore possess inherent value. Following from this, in keeping with "the formal principle of justice...we are required to give equal respect to those who have equal inherent value, whether they be moral agents or moral patients, and if the latter, whether they be humans or animals."[22] We can therefore account for our direct duty not to harm animals, by the principle that they are owed respect as individuals who possess inherent value.[23] "Regan concludes...[on the basis of his findings] that it is wrong to raise animals for food, to hunt or trap them, commercially or for sport, and to use them for research."[24]

Several objections have been raised against Regan's theory, both specifically and more generally against any theory that attempts to ascribe or extend moral rights to animals. The first entails a logical problem. In spite of Regan's appeal to rational thinking and conceptual clarity, the basis of his theory is intuition. He moves from the "considered belief" that because a moral patient is in possession of inherent value, he/she/it ought to have respect

and therefore rights. But there is no logical connection between the fact that animals have inherent value and the judgment that they ought to have rights. The logical gap between statements of fact and decisions or judgments about the future (or what should be) has been a problem in moral theory since Hume drew attention to it in the mid-eighteenth century. In fairness to Regan, he has acknowledged this obstacle in his theory, but one critic has said "It is difficult to see how we could have a useful notion of inherent value without first solving these traditional problems of moral theory."[25]

Furthermore, as Michael Fox has pointed out, the realm of moral institutions is a uniquely human one: "since the only species we know of that has developed the notions of rights and obligations (and the institutions associated with them) is *Homo sapiens*, there must be something about this peculiar sort of social being that accounts for the phenomenon..."[26] Extending moral rights to animals, therefore, does not in any real sense provide them with moral status as, say, extending basic rights to Blacks and women does. It would however change our moral status in relationship to them, by extending and increasing our duties and obligations to others--a move some think will only serve to denegrate and weaken the legitimate human rights movement.[27]

Finally, one last objection to Regan's theory is in order before moving on to Peter Singer's argument. It is a somewhat surprising charge against his anthropocentrism. It is surprising because Regan himself does not recognize it. His fight, as he puts it, is against "...human chauvinism--the conceit that we (humans) are so very special that we are the only conscious inhabitants on the face of the earth."[28] But Regan's analysis of the inherent value of animals is "decidely anthropocentric."[29] Their value is not determined by what is characteristically theirs, instead they are compared with human beings to determine whether they share with us the qualities that give us value. Those who share with humans enough of the required characteristics for inherent value are afforded rights ("mentally normal mammals of a year or more"),[30] those who do not, are denied rights.

Paul Taylor agrees that a rights-based view is anthropocentric: "It would be less misleading if we simply dropped the language of moral rights concerning [animals]...because the language of moral rights has come to be well-established in our assertions about the rights of persons, especially in first person assertions about our own rights."[31] In criticism of our treatment of animals, Regan comments, "You don't change unjust institutions by tidying them up,"[32] and it may well be that we can not change a traditional rights view by 'tidying it up' either.

Peter Singer's perspective on the moral status of animals disagrees with a view (such as Regan's) which ascribes rights (to animals or humans) according to a list of required qualities: "Our concern for others must not depend on whether they possess certain characteristics."[33] Rather, Singer agrees with Jeremy Bentham's position in his concern for animals: "The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but Can they suffer?"[34]

The task for Singer then, in establishing the moral status of animals, is to determine whether or not they suffer, for:

> If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration, and, indeed, to count it equally with the like suffering (if rough comparisons can be made) of any other being.[35]

As a utilitarian, Singer is concerned with the equal interests of all sentient beings, whether they be animal or human, and in particular, with their equal interest in being free from suffering.[36] Moral agents are duty-bound in his view to ensure the least amount of suffering and the greatest amount of pleasure for all beings concerned.

If it can be demonstrated, for example, that animals raised on factory farms as food for human consumption, or animals used in psychological experimentation and toxicity research, are all suffering under these circumstances, then these practices are morally wrong and human beings are obliged to stop them.

In his article "Animal Liberation," Singer argues at great length against these practices on the grounds that the animals involved suffer. In his mind there is no doubt that animals can, and do, suffer:

> Nearly all the external signs which lead us to infer pain in other humans can be seen in other species, especially 'higher' animals such as mammals and birds. Behavioural signs--writhing, yelping, or other forms of calling, attempts to avoid the source of pain,

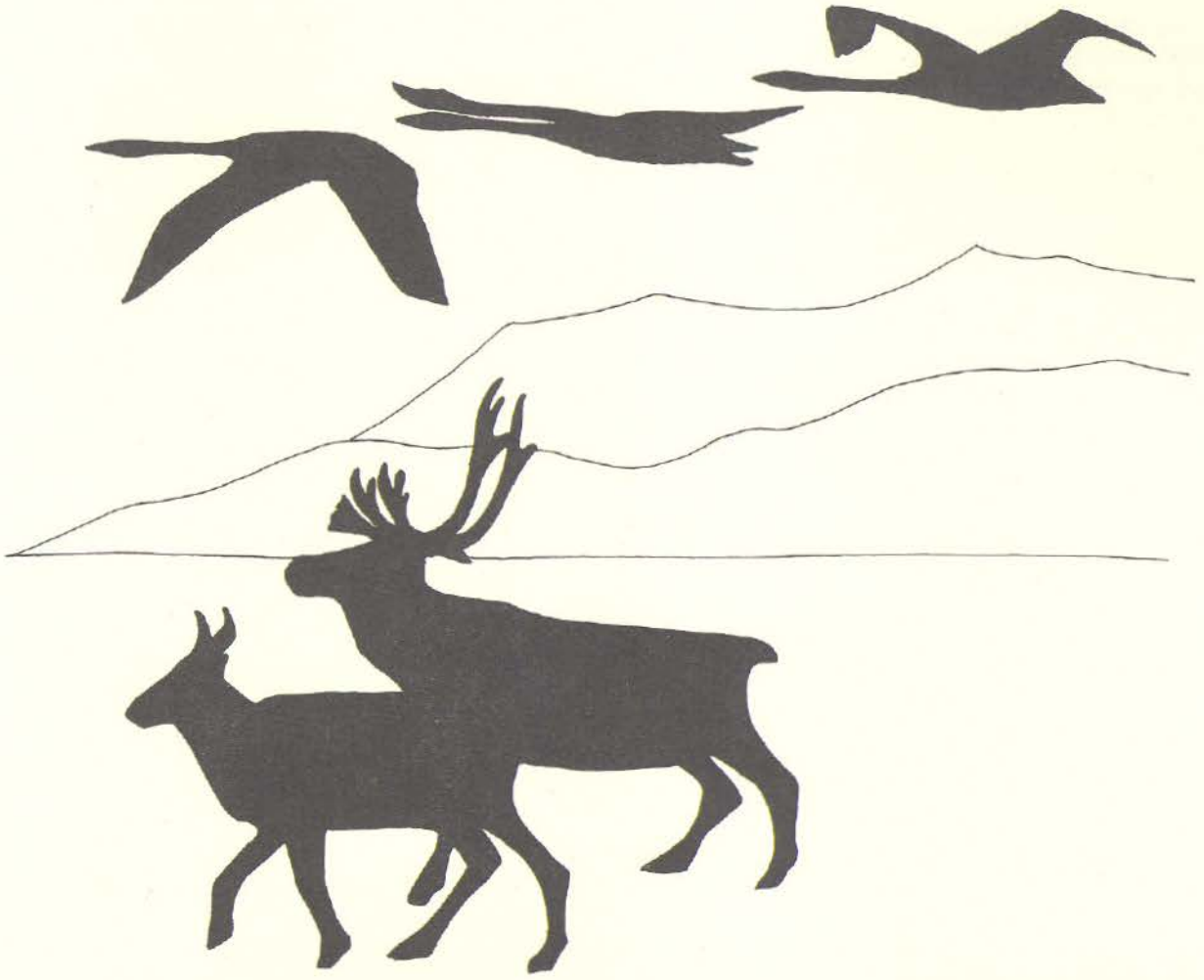
> and many others–are present. We know too that these animals are biologically similar in the relevant respects, having nervous systems like ours which can be observed to function as ours do.[37]

The argument that only human beings with the use of a developed language feel pain is dismissed by Singer, primarily on the grounds that use of language has nothing to do with feeling pain. Ability for conceptual thought and having intention are not required in order to feel pain, as is the case with human infants, and the fact that someone can say they are in pain is not a definite indication that they truly are. Hence, Singer accepts that "behavioural signs and knowledge of the animal's biological similarity to ourselves together provide adequate evidence that animals do suffer."[38]

So far, Singer's argument for the moral status of animals seems simple enough: we know that animals suffer; suffering is against a being's interests; as beings that suffer, animals have an interest in being free from suffering; we as moral agents must therefore act to reduce animal suffering as much as possible.

Not as simple is the question: Which animals suffer? Do they all, insects included? Singer determines that some animals suffer because they share with us a like nervous system which can stimulate pain response, and a similar brain capacity for negative feelings and emotions such as fear, anxiety and stress.[39] Now, "it remains to consider how far down the evolutionary scale this analogy holds."[40]

All mammals and birds, who share with humans the most anatomical and behavioral similarities, definitely do suffer and are therefore conscious. For all vertebrates (reptiles and fish) "the analogies are sufficiently close to suppose that they too possess consciousness,"[41] although the analogy does grow weaker the further down the evolutionary scale we go. Crustaceans, for example, make the list of con-



scious beings, aware of the pain they suffer and with an interest in being free of it, and therefore have moral status. But oysters, because they lack a sufficiently complex nervous system, probably do not feel pain and are therefore not conscious of suffering in any sense.[42] "Oysters," as one commentator on Singer has put it, "so different from us, are fair game for the gumbo."[43]

This, in essence, is Singer's theory. "Straightforward" as it is, he hoped it would have wide appeal and increase public awareness, but he also admits to using this line of argument because he was more certain about the wrongness of suffering than he was about the issue of killing animals. His continued defense of the practicality of a moral theory based on the capacity for suffering is cleverly underlined in a recent paper entitled "Animals and the Value of Life". In this paper, Singer seeks to address the wrongness of taking animal life by adopting and examining theories such as Regan's, which attempt to establish the value of animal life and thereby, their right to life.

At the conclusion of the paper, his findings leave him no less uncertain on the issue of killing, indeed, the theoretical conclusions which his inquiry brings leave both Singer and the reader dismayed about the exact nature of the right to life. In order to determine the value of animal life, it must meet with certain criteria derived from the value of human life. These criteria amount, in Singer's estimation, to a status of personhood (one who is self-conscious and rational), a status which he argues must theoretically be denied some humans. Even a utilitarian approach cannot solidly establish a theory of a right to life, unless it can be shown that "the loss of pleasure caused by the killing of one being can [not] be made up for by the creation of another being."[44]

The practical conclusion of this paper is that the issue of killing cannot be understood in isolation from the other realities, such as suffering, in a given situation. Animals that are killed for one reason or another, also suffer, through pain, or deprivation, or fear, or anxiety and so on. This knowledge should be our guiding principle in determining the moral status of animals. "To maintain that the lives of most animals are of less value than the lives of most humans is not to excuse what humans do to animals or to diminish the urgency of the struggle to end the callous exploitation of other species by our own."[45]

A serious objection raised against Singer's theory, is really a criticism of utilitarianism in general. Although its great appeal lies in its uncompromising egalitarianism, the kind of equality it applies is not the sort extended to individuals themselves, but rather to the sum total of individual interests. The consequences of moral acts are what count. The goal of utilitarianism is to bring about the best balance of satisfied interests over dissatisfied interests. That one or a few individuals (or many as the case may be) will be left with dissatisfied interests, is a consequence utilitarianism accepts.

For this reason utilitarianism is criticized as being "incompatible with the ideal of justice,"[46] which is based on individual rights. "Utilitarianism has no room for the moral rights of different individuals because it has no room for their equal inherent value or worth."[47]

Used as a basis for the moral status of animals, such a view toward animal interests is bound to come into insurmountable conflict with individual rights, particularly those of human beings whose rights are also protected by law. Such conflicts have already arisen between animal welfare groups and researchers and would be dramatically intensified if all meat producers and, indeed all individual meat eaters, suddenly interpreted their rights as being violated.

Singer's theory does not go far enough, therefore, in establishing solid ground for the moral status of animals. This, of course, may not deny the moral validity of his position, but it does indicate the serious difficulty one would have in adopting it as a workable ethic.

Another objection, more particular to Singer's theory, is of the same variety as raised against Regan's rights view, namely, that it is anthropocentric. Once again the criticism is surprising, because Singer spells out specifically that speciesism, defined as "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species,"[48] is the main target of his arguments.[49]

But while Regan makes mental analogies to humans, Singer refers to human behavioural and biological analogies as his measure of whether a particular species suffers and therefore qualifies as having moral status.

It is surprising in fact, that Singer does not recognize in some of his statements, his own brand of prejudice:

> It is not arbitrary to hold that the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, of complex acts of communication, and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities.[50]

As David Quammen has said of both Singer and Regan: "Make no mistake: Man [sic] is still the measure, for Singer and Regan. ...Instead of asking *Is the creature a human?*, they simply ask *How similar to human is similar enough?*"[51] This same critic has also said of these men, that they "show some shocking limitations of vision."[52] In fairness to both Regan and Singer, I think the true limitations of their attempts to formulate a workable ethic in regard to animals, stem from the traditional foundations of their theories.

Both men are locked into traditional frameworks conceived primarily to guide human individuals and human relationships. As a result, both are anthropocentric at their roots, and both are too narrowly focused on either individual rights or individual interests (albeit as a collectivity), and fail to address the problem within the wider context in which it exists. Bryan G. Norton sums up the most critical objection to both Regan's and Singer's theories, their 'moral atomism,' and suggests the need for a wider vision:

> The animal liberation movement is based upon an analogy between human and animal suffering and its main thrust is not to provide a means to adjudicate between conflicting demands that human individuals make on the environment, but rather it introduces a whole new category of demands--the demands of animals. ...Expanding the number and type of rights holders does not address the problem of which individual claims have priority over others--it only increases these demands and makes it more and more difficult to satisfy them. The basic problem, then, lies precisely in the emphasis on individual claims and interests. An environmental ethic must support the holistic functioning of an ongoing system.[53]

Holistic theories have responded to the recognition that traditional ethics meet with too many limitations when applied to animals and the environment generally. They represent a movement that is calling for a new way of doing ethics; for a radical shift in "our ideas about what kinds of action are moral and which are criminal."[54] They also require a change in human values, what John Rodman refers to as a 'paradigm change,' brought about not by "exhortation, threat, or logic, but a rebirth of the sense of wonder that in ancient times gave rise to philosophers but is now more often found among field naturalists."[55]

Unlike Singer's and Regan's views, holistic theories attempt to guide moral action within a much broader framework of relationships. The moral status of animals is established, not on the basis of their individual similarities to human beings, but according to their interdependence within the ecological community.

Most proponents of 'ethical holism' have either been influenced or inspired by the classical expression of the theory found in a chapter entitled "The Land Ethic," in Aldo Leopold's **A Sand County Almanac**, written over forty years ago. Leopold's 'land ethic' recognizes that all biological life thrives within a complex community of interdependence and that the natural systems in which they thrive (forests, oceans, mountains, swamps, etc.) are just as much a part of that interdependence as the life therein, and just as morally significant. Thus, the 'land ethic' "enlarges the boundaries of the [moral] community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals or collectively, the land."[56]

Viewed as a living organism in and of itself, the biotic community, as a whole (i.e. with all its constituent parts), becomes the object of moral concern. Its healthy maintenance and welfare are therefore the measure of moral action: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise."[57]

This guiding principle, though simply stated, has wide ranging implications. It means, for example, that: endangered and rare species would be given preferential treatment because they contribute to the diversity and therefore stability of the community; certain species such as the honey bee, whose function in the natural economy is critical, would have a greater claim to moral attention, than say a rabbit or a mole; hunting of certain species in certain areas may be morally obligatory in order to offset population explosions; plant life, so important in many ways to the biosphere, would be protected; predators would be nurtured and preserved as valuable mem-

bers of the community; and the human population would have to be brought under control.[58]

These implications, which only begin to scratch the surface, reflect the dramatic change in values necessary in order to implement the 'land ethic.' Individual and equal rights and interests in 'the land' would have to be abandoned. An attitude of respect for all life and for the community itself would be fundamental and imperative of all its members. Most importantly, the "land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it."[59]

Leopold offers no logical arguments, in general, to support the proposal of his 'land ethic.' He believes that such an ethic is an 'ecological necessity' and in time will evolve "in the minds of a thinking community" requiring "love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value."[60]

Logic and rationality appear to have little to do with the understanding and acceptance of Leopold's ethic. As J. Baird Callicott has observed:

> Whatever the strictly logical connections between the concept of a social community and a moral responsibility, there appears to be a strong psychological bond between that idea and conscience. Hence, the representation of the natural environment as, in Leopold's terms, "one humming community,"...brings into play, whether rationally or not, those stirrings of conscience which we feel in relation to delicately complex, functioning social and organic systems.[61]

John Rodman agrees that somehow, the grasp of the 'land ethic' defies logic: "such arguments could not persuade anyone who still looked at nature as if it were comprised of objects or mere resources, and such arguments are unnecessary for those who have come to perceive nature as composed of subjects."[62]

This change in perception is necessary and is the key underpinning of the 'land ethic,' for with a sufficient change in our perception, respectful conduct will seem 'natural' and the means by which we have traditionally understood ethical consideration (as rights and duties) will no longer be required or indeed, have a place.[63]

As radical as this shift in thinking may be, in terms of ethical theory, its acclimation in our minds is rather more subtle. John Rodman describes it as an 'ecological sensibility,' and in the following passage eloquently describes how it unfolds during a reading of Leopold's book:

> [we are] invited to accompany Leopold as he follows the tracks of a skunk in the January snow, wondering where the skunk is heading and why; speculating on the different meanings of a winter thaw for the mouse whose snow burrow has collapsed and for the owl who has just made dinner of the mouse; trying to understand the honking of the geese as they circle the pond; and wondering what the world must look like to a muskrat eye-deep in the swamp. By the time one reaches Leopold's discussion of the land ethic, one has grown accustomed to thinking of different animals--and (arguably), by extention, different natural entities in general--as subjects rather than objects, as beings that have their own purposes, their own perspectives on the world, and their own goods that are differentially affected by events. While we can never get inside a muskrat's head and know exactly what the world looks like from that angle, we can be pretty certain that the view is different from ours. What melts away as we become intrigued with this plurality of perspectives is the assumption that any one of them (for example, ours) is privileged.[64]

With respect to the moral status of animals then, the 'land ethic' offers a kind of all or nothing proposition. If we are to accept its position on the moral status of animals, then we must accept its position on our moral standing and the moral standing of the environment as well.

Once again, our traditions hamper us. Not only are our Western systems of moral philosophy anchored in logic and rational application, so too are our thought patterns and our entire World-view. Such a radical shift in the perception of the human experience strikes fear in the minds of those opposed to holistic theories and places them, not within the realm of ethics, but in a category with mysticism.

One of the most frequent arguments against

holistic theory, is that it denies "claims, rights, interests, the value of the individual, and so on,"[65] all of the foundations upon which traditional ethics are built.

Some philosophers go so far as to interpret holism as being anti-human because it implies that "massive human diebacks would be good. It is our species' duty to eliminate 90 percent of our numbers,"[66] they warn. In a similar vein, Tom Regan exaggerates the clash between what he terms 'environmental fascism' and the rights view, in this passage:

> If...the situation we faced was either to kill a rare wildflower or a (plentiful) human being, and if the wildflower, as a 'team member,' would contribute more to "the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" than the human, then presumably we would not be doing wrong if we killed the human and saved the wildflower.[67]

These arguments (and anxieties) illustrate the underlying principle objection to holism: that it is at best theoretically unclear, and at worst, incoherent as an ethical theory. Even in the minds of proponents, holism is considered "still-emergent."[68] In their existing presentation, and this is especially true of Leopold's 'land ethic,' they are interpreted by conservative minds as being more akin to the 'primitive' North American native's respect for nature,[69] than to a comprehensible ethical system. As such, their acceptance requires visionary thinking, a leap of faith, and a journey back to the starting point out of which our traditional ethics once grew. It is a task for scholars, Aldo Leopold says:

> Ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down, in the last analysis, to a question of intellectual humility. The shallow-minded modern who has lost his [sic] rootage in the land assumes that he [sic] has already discovered what is important; it is such who prate of empires, political or economic, that will last a thousand years. It is only the scholar who appreciates that all of history consists of successive excursions from a single starting point, to which man [sic] returns again and again to organize yet another search for a durable scale of values. It is only the scholar who understands why the raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise.[70]

The fact that the 'land ethic' is not to be understood in logical terms, but rather as an evolutionary process of sensibility, involving more than just our reason, leaves it open to possibilities. But for the moment, the moral status of animals, as holistic theories would apply it, remains outside our current understanding of ethics and on a path of thought that we have yet to explore.

Ultimately, the hinderance to assigning a moral status to animals stems from our limited framework of ethical understanding. Attempts by traditional rights and utilitarian theories to crossover from human to non-human application, admirable as they may be, are hampered by their anthropocentrism and their moral atomism. They attempt to logically apply moral status to animals and fail. There is no room within such narrow ethical systems for animals other than humans. Both Regan's and Singer's theories lead us to dead ends.

Holistic theories seek to address these limitations by taking us in a new direction, perhaps even returning us to a very ancient and fundamental understanding of ourselves and our place on this planet. They lead us, frighteningly, into the realms of an entirely different existence, beyond the boundaries of current ethical understanding. As philosophers continue in their search for an ethical system that will include animals, they may discover that the fences of logic and reason no longer hold them, and that, as the pioneers of 'ethical holism' found, the future of ethics is on the road not taken.

Notes

1. John Passmore, **Man's Responsibility for Nature** (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), pp. 3-4.

2. Immanual Kant quoted in Mary Midgley, "Persons and Non-Persons", in **In Defense of Animals**, ed. Peter Singer (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1985), p. 57.

3. This is an interpretation only of Western attitudes and Western moral philosophy. Eastern traditions, in the main, hold different views.

4. Tom Regan, **The Case For Animal Rights** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 147.

5. Ibid., pp. 148-149.

6. Cited in Edward Johnson, "Treating the Dirt", in **Earthbound**, ed. Tom Regan (New York: Random House, Inc., 1984), p. 342.

7. Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation", in **Environmental Ethics**, ed. K.S. Shrader-Frechette (Pacific Grove: The Boxwood Press, 1985), p. 104.

8. Unfortunately Taylor's theory will not be included in further discussion. It is included here as an example of an attempt to break with ethical tradition, but does not go far enough to be considered holistic. In some respects

it maintains tradition, especially in its continued respect for the individual.

9. Cited in Edward Johnson, "Treating the Dirt", p. 348.

10. Cited in Edward Johnson, "Treating the Dirt", p. 356.

11. Bernard E. Rollin, **Animal Rights and Human Morality** (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1981), p. 69.

12. Ibid., p. 70. This position is not difficult to accept when we consider the ease with which we have entered into war and thereby legally killed our enemies --individuals who supposedly possess a natural right to life as well. This is not to say that war is right in any sense, it merely illustrates the difficulty human beings have had in upholding moral as opposed to legal rights.

13. Tom Regan, "Introduction", in **Earthbound**, ed. Tom Regan (New York: Random House, Inc., 1984), p. 29.

14. Bernard E. Rollin, **Animal Rights and Human Morality**, p.73.

15. Tom Regan, **The Case For Animal Rights**, pp. 148-149. Regan has been critized for being "too cerebral" (see p. 25, **In Defense of Animals**, Singer) and admits himself that his notion of inherent value limits the criteria of simplicity. See p. 264, in **The Case For Animal Rights.**

16. Tom Regan, "Introduction", in **Earthbound**, pp. 30-31.

17. Tom Regan, **The Case For Animal Rights**, p. 193.

18. Ibid., p. 154.

19. Ibid., p. 119.

20. Ibid., p. 240.

21. Ibid., p. 264.

22. Ibid., pp. 263-264.

23. Singer has unfairly criticized Regan's theory as not allowing a subject of a life to be killed, even if it meant saving a greater number of lives. (see p. 360 in "Animals and the Value of Life" in **Matters of Life and Death**, ed. Tom Regan (New York: Random House, 1986)) This is not the case. The right to respect may be overridden by the Miniride Principle. See p. 328 in **The Case for Animal Rights.**

24. Alastair S. Gunn, "Preserving Rare Species", **Earthbound.** ed. Tom Regan (New York: Random House, 1984) p. 308.

25. Edward Johnson, "Treating the Dirt", pp. 344-345.

26. Michael A. Fox, **The Case for Animal Experimentation** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 56.

27. Ibid., p. 59.

28. Tom Regan, **The Case for Animal Rights**, p. 33.

29. David Quammen, **Natural Acts** (New York: Dell Publishing, 1985), p. 140.

30. Ibid., p. 139.

31. Paul Taylor, **Respect for Nature** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 254.

32. Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights", in **In Defense of Animals.** ed. Peter Singer (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1985), p. 13.

33. Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation", p. 104.

34. Ibid., p. 104.

35. Ibid.

36. The term "suffering" is used by Singer primarily in reference to physical pain, but it also applies to the experience of animals under emotions of fear, anxiety, stress, and so on.

37. Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation", p. 105.

38. Ibid., pp. 105-106.

39. Peter Singer, "Animals and the Value of Life", pp. 344-345.

40. Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation", p. 106.

41. Peter Singer, "Animals and the Value of Life", p. 345.

42. Ibid., pp. 344-345. Singer admits that lack of knowledge about the lower forms of life, require that we remain "agnostic about whether they are capable of suffering." see p. 106 in "Animal Liberation".

43. David Quammen, **Natural Acts**, p. 140.

44. Peter Singer, "Animals and the Value of Life", p. 372.

45. Ibid., p. 375.

46. James Rachels, **The Elements of Moral Philosophy** (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 94.

47. Tom Regan, "The Case for Animals Rights", p. 19.

48. Michael A. Fox, "Animal Liberation: A Critique", in **Environmental Ethics**, ed. K.S. Shrader-Frechette (Pacific Grove: The Boxwood Press, 1985), p. 114.

49. Peter Singer, "Animals and the Value of Life", p. 353.

50. Cited in Michael A. Fox, "Animal Liberation: A Critique", p. 118.

51. David Quammen, **Natural Acts**, p. 140.

52. Ibid., p. 136.

53. Cited in Edward Johnson, "Treating the Dirt", p. 358.

54. Cited in John Passmore, **Man's Responsibility for Nature**, p. 5.

55. John Rodman, "Four Forms of Ecological Consciousness Reconsidered", in **Ethics and the Environment**, eds. D. Scherer and T. Attig (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983), p. 90.

56. Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic", in **Ethics and the Environment**, eds. D. Scherer and T. Attig (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983), p. 7.

57. Ibid., p. 8.

58. J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair", in **Ethics and the Environment**, eds. D. Scherer and T. Attig (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 61, 64-65.

59. Cited in J. Baird Callicott, "In Search of an Environmental Ethic", in **Matters of Life and Death**, ed. Tom Regan (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 408.

60. Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic", pp. 7-8.

61. J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair", p. 62.

62. John Rodman, "Four Forms of Ecological Consciousness Reconsidered", p. 90.

63. Ibid., p. 90.

64. Ibid., p. 89.

65 Edward Johnson, "Treating the Dirt", p. 359. See also, Taylor, **Respect for Nature**, pp. 118-119, 286.

66. J. Baird Callicott, "In Search of an Environmental Ethic", p. 410.

67. Tom Regan, **The Case for Animal Rights**, p. 362.

68. John Rodman, "Four Forms of Ecological Consciousness Reconsidered", p. 82.

69. Douglas H. Strong and Elizabeth S. Rosenfield, "Ethics or Expediency: An Environmental Question", in **Environmental Ethics**, ed. K.S. Shrader-Frechette (Pacific Grove: The Boxwood Press, 1985), p. 10.

70. Aldo Leopold, **A Sand County Almanac**, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), p. 279.