

The Virtues of Stewardship

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What virtues do good stewards typically have and can these virtues move people to be good stewards of nature? Why focus on the virtues of stewards rather than on trying to construct and defend morally obligatory rules to govern human behavior? I argue that benevolence and loyalty are crucial for good stewardship and these virtues can and do motivate people to act as good stewards of nature. Moreover, since it is a matter of dispute whether rational considerations can move us to perform a given act in the absence of disposition to do so, I argue we should try to determine which moral dispositions (if any) will motivate people to be concerned for the environment so that the development of environmentally sensitive character may be encouraged.

Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chooses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. It is not against reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.

—DAVID HUME¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Much recent work in environmental ethics has aimed to construct and justify nonanthropocentric theories of value² that would make preservation of the natural world morally obligatory.³ The ecocentric, biocentric, deep ecological, and related theories produced vary in their normative content but generally coincide in an “externalist” view of the relation of moral considerations to our

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¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 416 (emphasis added).

² The term *anthropocentric* is sometimes used simply to indicate a human-centered point of view (in parallel with terms such as ethnocentric and egocentric) which has the effect of making human interests and values most prominent or striking. Some also use it in a narrower sense, to indicate interests or commitments to benefit whatever one puts at the center of one’s point of view, to the exclusion of others. I believe the former use is the more common and so follow it here and propose *speciesist* as an alternative to cover the narrower category of preferences or principled commitments to put human interests before those of other species.

³ On the desirability of developing such ethical theories/theories of value, see, e.g., Richard Routley [Sylvan], “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?” *Proceedings of the XV World Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (1973): 205–10; Holmes Rolston, III, “Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World,” in F. Herbert Bormann and Stephen R. Kellert, eds., *The Broken Circle: Ecology, Economics, and Ethics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Arne Naess, “The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects,” *Philosophy-*

motivation to act upon them. That is, they generally agree that we will be motivated to comply with a moral principle of action if it can be shown to be justified by a defensible moral theory. It need not also be shown that there is internal to our character some antecedent desire for or interest in whatever conduct is being morally prescribed in order for us to act upon the prescription.⁴ Thus, to dissuade us from environmentally destructive practices, externalists seek to develop defensible nonanthropocentric normative principles with which those practices are inconsistent. Aldo Leopold is sometimes thought to have advocated an externalist approach in calling for what he refers to as a “land ethic [that] simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land.”⁵

But the externalist view of the relation of moral considerations to our motivation to act upon them is not universally accepted. Internalists, such as David Hume, have held that theoretical justifications will *not* motivate an agent to act independent of interests, wants, or needs internal to the agent’s character whose satisfaction depends upon realizing the objectives of a given theory. Consequently, internalists are more strongly inclined to approach a subject such as human behavior toward the natural world via moral psychology, to determine which dispositions appear to play the most significant roles in shaping human responses to the environment in order to discover what sorts of environmental policies we can be motivated to approve and adopt.

Internalist approaches to environmental ethics have generated less excitement thus far because the results they promise are necessarily more modest. One can at least hope to *construct* a defensible theory of value that would generate normative principles making preservation of the natural world absolutely and universally morally obligatory. One cannot similarly hope to discover human dispositions that can be expected absolutely and universally to motivate humans to act to preserve nature. Thomas E. Hill, Jr.’s paper, “Ideals of Human Excellence and the Natural Environment,”⁶ is perhaps the best-known example

cal Inquiry 8 (1983): 10–31; J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); and Laura Westra, “Why Norton’s Approach is Insufficient for Environmental Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997): 279–97.

⁴ This is a somewhat loose definition which I take to be adequate for the purpose at hand. For a fuller discussion see, John Robertson and Michael Stocker, “Externalism and Internalism,” in Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, eds., *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, vol. 1 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), pp. 352–54.

⁵ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 204. Interestingly, J. Baird Callicott has argued there are both internalist and externalist dimensions to Leopold’s position. See his *In Defense of the Land Ethic*.

⁶ Thomas E. Hill, Jr., “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments,” *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 211–24.

of such an approach. In this paper, Hill offers a thoughtful analysis of the motivations underlying a decision to destroy a garden, and then argues that these motivations are incompatible with other, virtuous dispositions that are integral to any one's social and personal projects. However, he necessarily stops short of offering any universal condemnation of such an act as immoral.⁷

Hill's results also illustrate what many take to be a second unfortunate consequence of internalist approaches to environmental ethics: that they will yield at most an enlightened anthropocentrism. If we are to accept the testimony of human history, we are characteristically (in descending order) egocentric, ethnocentric, and anthropocentric in our dispositions to act. Of course, we are not exclusively egoistic nor ethnocentric. Moreover, we are capable of giving serious consideration to the interests of at least some other species. However, the more distant the benefits are of the sacrifices we must first make, the more difficult it is to engage interests or sympathies that will move us to make those sacrifices.⁸ As Mark Sagoff once remarked of himself, "I have an Ecology Now sticker on the bumper of a car that leaks oil everywhere it's parked."⁹ Large-scale environmental problems such as global warming, loss of biodiversity, and depletion of nonrenewable resources can be resolved only by long-term commitments by individuals who cannot expect any direct benefit to themselves or their communities as a result. If we are to rise to these sorts of challenges, one may ask, will enlightened anthropocentrism be enough? Is enlightened anthropocentrism sufficient to make us effective stewards of the natural world?

Following Hume, my answer is that it had better be, because I do not believe that we can be motivated to act to preserve values fundamentally inconsistent with our predominant dispositions to action. No amount of argumentation, however well intentioned, will move people to act for the sake of "values" about which they do not care. Since the externalist/internalist debate is a matter for metaethics, I do not attempt to defend my allegiance here. For the moment,

⁷ Of course, Hill's paper is the not only contribution. For some more recent examples, see Geoffrey B. Frasz, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: A New Direction for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1993): 259–74; Philip Cafaro, "Thoreauvian Patriotism as an Environmental Virtue," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 2 (1995): 1–7; Bill Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997): 53–67.

⁸ Recently, it has been suggested that we may find healthy environmental conditions agreeable for their own sake. While no one could argue that people find environments, healthy and unhealthy, aesthetically pleasing, it is a matter of great controversy whether we have a propensity to find healthy environments inherently agreeable. The testimony of human history does not appear to support the suggestion. Consequently, I do not follow up such suggestions in this paper. For a sympathetic critique, see Ernest Partridge, "Ecological Morality and Nonmoral Sentiments," *Environmental Ethics* 18 (1996): 149–63.

⁹ Mark Sagoff, "At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, or Why Political Questions are not All Economic," *Arizona Law Review* 23 (1981): 1283–98, reprinted in James P. Sterba, ed., *Earth Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 374.

I simply note that in a world where many have yet to adopt and act upon widely promulgated and well-defended theories of universal human rights, equality, and universal duties of impartiality and justice, to throw all one's efforts into the development of newer and better normative principles would be misguided. We need to balance such research with careful attention to resources traditional human-centered virtues of character may yet provide for the motivation of environmentally responsible behavior.

My discussion here is intended to be a contribution to the small but growing field of environmental virtue ethics. In environmental ethics (as in recent ethics generally), virtue ethics is regularly taken to be synonymous with Aristotelian eudaimonism—i.e., the theory that evaluates human character and habits of action by their contribution to the agent's achievement of *eudaimonia* through the realization of his or her unique human *telos* or end. If there is a unique human *telos* on which our realization of the good life depends, then the problem of our motivation to act as morality requires is resolved. But is there a human *telos*? How can we know what it is or whether specific dispositions to action, say concern for nature, are among the dispositions through which we can realize our *telos*? The difficulty of answering such questions encouraged later theorists to develop means of evaluating human dispositions without reference to such a standard. Hume is one of this group.

Virtues, Hume held,¹⁰ are those dispositions to action that are either useful or agreeable in themselves to human beings. A virtue ethics approach to questions of whether we should preserve natural landscapes or biodiversity, conducted on Humean lines, examines what could motivate us to preserve nature and whether the dispositions involved are likely to be generally approved as inherently agreeable or agreeable for their utility in serving human desires for happiness, peace, security, beauty, and so forth. In other words, we would want to know what (if anything) motivates people to function effectively as voluntary *stewards* of the natural world. Thus, the dispositions in which I am interested are those that typically dispose us voluntarily to act as stewards of the natural world in our species' long-run interests in the preservation of natural beauty, biodiversity, renewable and nonrenewable resources, and so forth.

In what follows, I discuss loyalty and benevolence, two traditionally virtuous dispositions that seem central to the character of stewards. In order to assess the extent to which these dispositions can motivate us to sacrifice personal convenience to preserve the environment, I test these virtues in a type of "last man" scenario (discussed below). I argue that even in such an extreme situation, an individual whose stewardship of nature is grounded in enlightened anthropocentrism could be morally motivated to resist the destruction of the world. I do *not* claim that the virtues involved are always sufficient to lead people to behave in environmentally friendly ways. However, I believe they are suffi-

¹⁰ This definition of *virtue* is developed in Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).

cient, when coupled with the right background information and experiences, to lead most people to devote more than nominal concern and attention to environmental preservation. Thus, encouraging the development of such virtues should be among the objectives of anyone interested in the development of environmentally responsible moral character.

II. STEWARDSHIP

One swallow does not make a summer, nor one act a steward. Stewardship is a social role individuals adopt toward some other, a role sustained over time. To be a steward is to devote a substantial percentage of one's thoughts and efforts to maintaining or enhancing the condition of some thing(s) or person(s), not primarily for the steward's own sake. What stewards care for may or not be the person or institution they steward. Museum curators are stewards preserving historical or art objects for the public good; regents are stewards of kingdoms administered for their monarchs, while parents are stewards of children reared for their own sake. Environmental stewards would be persons who consistently devote a substantial amount of thought and effort to preserving the natural world, not primarily for their own benefit. They may or may not be paid for some of the actions they undertake. Being paid should not bar us from seeing them as stewards of nature so long as their salaries are not their primary or only incentive, and their environmental concern is not limited to their working hours.

To be capable of appointing oneself and functioning as a steward in this sense, one would seem to need a character strongly marked by dispositions to benevolence or loyalty or both. Stewards may be motivated by future-oriented or backward-looking motivations in different cases. For example, an abandoned kitten at my door may stimulate a benevolent stewardship of the animal. The death of a colleague, on the other hand, provides an opportunity for an expression of loyalty to shared commitments, which may result in stewardship of her posthumous papers or literary legacy. Other situations prompt stewardship motivated by both sorts of dispositions. Children, for instance, invite both benevolent and loyal stewardship of their development and well-being. To be a good steward, one also needs a host of other virtues, such as patience, self-discipline, courage, and/or thrift. No one could be a good steward who lacked any of these other virtues. But no one would be a steward who had only these virtues. To willingly act as steward for another one must care about the person(s) whose interests are thus served. In what follows, I focus on the virtues of benevolence and loyalty, which I take to be central to the character of most willing stewards.¹¹

Why bother, a critic may ask, since environmental stewardship motivated by

¹¹ I do not deny that some other traditional virtues can motivate individuals to act as stewards of things or persons on another's behalf in particular cases. Respect for the purposes or labors of a divine Creator where this respect is distinct from benevolence toward such a being or loyalty

such human-centered virtues will inevitably prove incapable of motivating the sort of large-scale environmental actions needed to preserve what remains of the natural world? To illustrate, the critic might use a sort of latter-day version of Hume's example quoted above. If for an anthropocentrist such as Hume, virtues are dispositions valued for their agreeableness or utility to persons, then causing the destruction of the world is not against reason or virtue, so long as no person is harmed thereby. Imagine that a series of natural catastrophes has struck the human race, reducing it to a single individual—a last *man*.¹² Unwilling to permit lower species to inherit the Earth, he plans to annihilate the remaining biosphere with the aid of nuclear weapons now at his disposal. Would it be inconsistent with the anthropocentric virtues of an environmental steward to destroy the world? No, the critic will argue. Yet such an act is surely immoral whether or not human interests are significantly affected. Because enlightened anthropocentrism cannot explain or justify our condemnation of the last man's act, enlightened anthropocentrism and its virtues must be rejected as a basis for environmentally responsible moral agency.

This rejection would be a rather abrupt dismissal of a virtue that has probably motivated more ordinary people to lobby, vote, organize for, and otherwise support environmental preservation than any other. Benevolent interest in our own descendants is a powerful motivator—one to which politicians and lobbyists are quick to appeal, when possible, in support of policy initiatives designed to maintain or improve environmental quality. Still, the critic has a point. The last man scenario has its analogies in our own lives. Rare species whose loss are unlikely to affect future generations are threatened with extinction. Uniquely beautiful river vistas, which our descendants may not even know have been lost, are threatened with destruction to provide reservoirs and hydroelectric plants for existing human beings. Benevolence to our kind does not provide us with strong incentives to oppose such changes to our environment. If, nonetheless, we are strongly inclined to oppose them, we will have to appeal to dispositions other than benevolence for an explanation.

Of course, a merely benevolent steward could find destruction of the biosphere distasteful on account of the suffering caused to other sentient creatures in the process. Benevolence moves us to concern ourselves with the pains and pleasures of others. Since these experiences are not restricted to human beings, a benevolent last man could be strongly moved to spare the biosphere. However, the critic can revise the scenario to strengthen the case against benevolence by stipulating that the catastrophes responsible for human extinction have *also*

to the being's ideals, values, or purposes is perhaps the most compelling example of such a disposition. Because I consider in general the secular moral virtues of benevolence and loyalty typically to be the predominantly compelling virtues, I focus on them.

¹² Traditionally, the "last" individual in these scenarios is male (see Routley, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?"). There is, moreover, a practical reason for following tradition—it neatly precludes the possibility of pregnancy.

annihilated all other forms of vertebrate and higher invertebrate life. The last man's destruction of the biosphere would thus have no impact upon any sentient creature other than himself. Again, we must look beyond benevolence if we are to explain our repugnance for seeing the biosphere go bang.

Fortunately for the biosphere, stewards are often stewards out of loyalty as well as benevolence. For individuals voluntarily assuming the role of a steward of nature out of loyalty, the existence or nonexistence of future generations does not determine whether or not that stewardship can meaningfully continue. Loyalty, unlike benevolence, is not an inherently forward-looking disposition. That is, it is not the objective of loyalty to alter current or future human affairs for the better. Loyalty is backward looking, a response to the past behavior of others.

III. LOYAL STEWARDSHIP

Loyalty, like gratitude, is a virtue of beneficiaries. Loyalty may be distinguished from gratitude by the nature of the services that regularly prompt loyalty in response. I may be grateful for a loan, for a lifesaving organ-transplant, or for friendly forbearance of my less likeable habits. But I am not likely to be loyal to my bank manager, my doctor, or my colleagues unless other conditions besides the receipt of a favor are also met. A clue to the nature of those further conditions may be found in the language we use to describe our relation to individuals, groups, or institutions to whom or which we are loyal.

Loyal agents are frequently described and self-described as *identifying* with those to whom they are loyal. This talk indicates the peculiar kind of service for which loyalty is the response—service to the formation of our characters, central life projects, or if you will, our identities. Our personal identities take shape through the emulation of and identification with the ideals, practices, values, and character of others. Loyalty is the acknowledgment of such a continuing gift. We are (or should be) loyal to those who have served as our templates—for it is by our identification with and participation in their practices and projects that we have developed the character traits and values in which we take pride.¹³ So understood, loyalty is integral to one's moral integrity. Disloyalty, by contrast, always imperils personal integrity by its false accounting of our most significant relationships, a false accounting which involves self-deception in its least malign forms, cruelty in its worst.

We each have many loyalties that sometimes conflict. In this respect, loyalty is no different from benevolence or charity. If, to take an old example, I must choose whether to betray my country or my friend (assuming it is somehow merely a question of loyalty), then the greater loyalty will go to the one to

¹³ Moral lessons learned from negative example of others do not involve identification with or loyalty to the person providing the negative example. Thus, they do not give rise to loyalty.

whom I owe the most for the personal values, goals, or ideals I now hold dear.¹⁴ It should not be surprising that the varying life experiences of different persons lead them to different resolutions of such a problem.

That there will be no future generations of human life is no obstacle to a last man's stewardship of the natural world, if he had appointed himself to the role at least partly from loyalty. Loyalties often dispose us to look out for future generations—though not primarily out of a benevolent interest in their welfare but as a means of responding to our benefactors. For example, many of us keep inherited books, keepsakes, or toys to pass on to our children or grandchildren. We are not merely being thrifty when we do. We preserve these objects out of loyalty to individuals and communities through identification with which our values, virtues, and ideals have been formed—with the intention of using these objects to influence the characters of our progeny.

Through such objects, we give a variety of expressions to our loyalties. We keep their previous owners and their characters fresh in our minds, reinforcing our identification with them, helping to maintain the integrity of our characters. In addition, we extend the influence of those to whom we are loyal to another generation. With these objects, we recreate our predecessors' rituals, retell their tales, or recount their doings. By these means, we seek to make their characters, their rituals, and their values real and accessible to our descendants or students.

However, even if we never had nor ever could have descendants, and even if our own identification with our predecessors' traits, values, or ideals could not benefit from reinforcement, our preservation of those objects could still be a meaningful expression of loyalty. The acknowledgment that loyalty moves us to give of another person's or group's contributions to our characters need not involve third parties. It is enough if we act in such a way as to indicate our ongoing appreciation of the peculiar service we have received. Perhaps the best and most consistent way to acknowledge shared values, shared commitments, or shared ideals is to continue with them even after those with whom we shared them are gone.

For many of us, natural landscapes are chief among the relics through which we honor and renew our identification with past generations and attempt to extend their influence into the future. For most of us, walks in the woods or along the coast, bird-watching, berry-picking, camping, fishing, hunting, and other such experiences with friends and family have been rituals or practices through which important values were enacted or illustrated for us, as well as supplying opportunities to share in and emulate those rituals, practices, and

¹⁴ Consequently, I find it difficult to believe that the supposed hobgoblin of arguments for loyalty, the "loyal Nazi" really poses a serious threat. I do not believe that a Nazi's reprehensible actions undertaken in the name of party loyalty can be justified by that appeal, since it is unlikely that any individual Nazi can have owed more to the party than to the many institutions and persons which the party threatened.

values. As parents, grandparents, aunts, or friends, we seek out the same sorts of locales in which to recreate these experiences for our own children, friends, or other loved ones. Loyalty to those who have taught us in and through such natural landscapes, entities, and processes makes us desire their preservation and deplore their degradation.

Moreover, the predecessors in whose memory we preserve a natural landscape need not be directly related to us. They may be members of distant generations responsible for establishing our culture or distinctive ways of life. As Leopold notes, “the rich diversity of the world’s cultures reflects a corresponding diversity in the wilds that gave them birth.”¹⁵ On these grounds, Leopold argues for the preservation of portions of the American prairie and other relatively “natural” areas as a living, interactive memorial to honor the courage, hardiness, and other pioneering virtues of earlier inhabitants—“for the edification of those who one day may wish to see, feel, or study the origins of their cultural inheritance” or who wish others to be able to do so.¹⁶ In “Wildlife in American Culture,” Leopold writes, “there is value in any experience, that reminds us of our distinctive national origins and evolution, i.e. that stimulates awareness of history. Such awareness is nationalism in its best sense.”¹⁷ North Americans (whether of European, Asian, African, or native descent) need wilderness, he thought, to imaginatively recreate or reinforce the more desirable cultural legacies of the past. Loss of the opportunity for such experiences will not prevent people from trying to have them, but will distort the lessons learned. Using hunting as an example of a way individuals may try to rehearse their predecessors’ thrift, self-reliance, and sensitivity to their environments, Leopold demonstrates how distortions can arise.

Consider the duck hunter, sitting in a steel boat behind composition decoys. A put-put motor has brought him to the blind without exercise. Canned heat stands by to warm him in case of a chilling wind. He talks to passing flocks on a factory caller, in what he hopes are seductive tones; home lessons from a phonograph record have taught him how the decoys work, despite the caller; a flock circles in. It must be shot at before it circles twice, for the marsh bristles with other sportsmen, similarly accoutered, who might shoot first. He opens up at 70 yards. . . . The flock flares. A couple of cripples scale off to die elsewhere. Is this sportsman absorbing cultural value? or is he just feeding minks?”¹⁸

Cultures are adaptations to a group’s circumstances—especially its environment. Faithful transmission and reinvigoration of values and virtues across generations requires the preservation of some of that natural landscape and its fauna reasonably intact and not merely the conservation of recreational “green

¹⁵ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 188.

¹⁶ See “Wilderness,” in Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, pp. 188–200.

¹⁷ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 177.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

spaces” denuded of their original features out of concern for modern sensibilities. Of course, since not everyone who identifies with and means to emulate his or her predecessors’ virtues or values or ideals will take up duck hunting, mountaineering, harvesting wild rice by hand, or spear fishing, places for these activities need not be provided for all possible members of each generation. However, enough must be preserved so that members of future generations who wish can revisit and/or redescribe them in terms (or other media) that their contemporaries can use to acknowledge and reinforce important cultural values.

If the last man had adopted the outlook of a steward upon the natural world out of loyalty to values shared with family, friends, or the founders of his culture, his impulse to deny other organisms the chance to “succeed” humanity would not be unopposed by his other virtues. Loyalty would press for the acknowledgment of shared commitments, ideals, and values, preferably by continuing in them whenever possible, paying honor to them when it is not. While the last man might (bizarrely) be loyal to others for their shared commitment to sheer destructiveness (in which case he would never have elected to act as a steward of nature), it is unlikely that destruction of the biosphere would be a reasonable way of continuing or honoring the values or projects of those to whom his loyalties were directed. In such a situation, relatively few of the projects and values one once shared with others can be sustained. Among those which can are the practices and projects to which interaction with natural landscapes are integral—i.e., watching sunsets, camping, fishing, hiking, or harvesting wild rice by hand. Since the natural landscapes integral to those activities include sentient life, loyalty would oppose the destruction of the biosphere—just as in our own lives loyalty to our own predecessors often stands in the way of the destruction of historic buildings, battlefields, and groves.

Thus, the human-centered virtues integral to voluntary stewardship, benevolence and loyalty can motivate human beings with reasons to make sacrifices of personal resources and convenience in order to preserve natural landscapes, air and water quality, and biodiversity, for the sake of both future and past generations. For individuals actually to see stewardship as an appropriate role to adopt toward the natural world, extensive education in environmental processes is needed. They must understand not only how current human management of the natural world may effect their descendants quality of life, but also how specific natural landscapes and natural events have shaped human history and human traditions. At present in North America, little ecological science or history is mandated as part of general education. Unless this situation changes, the number of individuals who will voluntarily adopt the role of stewards of their environments will be fewer than they could be or should be. But the problem, from a Humean perspective, is not that people care too much for the welfare, values, or fate of humanity. It is that they care too little, because they do not understand how much care is needed. Thus, ignorance rather than anthropo-

centrism is the obstacle. It is impossible for environmentally responsible conduct to occur without improved understanding of the fragility of natural systems and processes and the importance of maintaining them for human cultural and physical survival.

IV. OBJECTIONS

A number of objections may be raised to the suggestions I have made. First, it may be argued that even if individuals were educated so as to encourage benevolent and loyal stewardship of nature, the results would fall short of what we should desire. There are rare species and isolated ecosystems that have played no important role in any existing culture's development and whose loss is unlikely to affect the welfare of any future generation. Merely enlightened anthropocentrists could tolerate their destruction out of a benevolent concern for the well-being of existing human beings or their near descendants. Second, it may be argued that, overall, loyalty is a vice rather than a virtue in human affairs. Because it is not consistent with anthropocentrism to encourage character traits that reduce human flourishing by promoting disagreement and disorder, they should not encourage loyal as well as benevolent stewardship of nature.

Concerning the first objection, I agree that inculcating the virtues central to stewardship together with the environmental understanding required to motivate stewardship of nature will not preclude the adoption of policies destructive of or deleterious to wildlife or landscapes. As one who aspires to no more than enlightened anthropocentrism, I am, of course, unapologetic about this point. If species or entities about which virtually no one cares, has cared, or are ever likely to care can be saved from extinction only by demanding enormous sacrifices of things for which many people have cared, do care, and will continue to care, then we can and perhaps must permit their destruction. As a rule, uncertainty about our understanding of the natural systems involved favors preservation. However, in those instances where both our certainty and the costs are very high, I cannot see why we must accept the costs.

The second objection raises more complicated issues. First, some would argue that loyalty is simply another name for ethnocentrism, an uncritical prejudice in favor of one's own group's or culture's practices. Ethnocentrism has often proved disadvantageous by complicating relations between societies and between groups within multicultural societies, to the detriment of social order and cooperation. Thus, loyalty is not a virtue but a vice. Second, others have argued that loyalty is inherently exploitive. For example, Marcia Baron has remarked, "one may wonder whether loyalty and related virtues are virtues only in the context of . . . hierarchical role relationships, for example, a society in which a wife is to serve her husband, a servant is to serve his or her master, and so on. (It is noteworthy that while the loyalty of dogs . . . [and] of servants . . . is extolled, we almost never hear of a master being praised for his loyalty

to his dog or to his servant).”¹⁹ On this view, loyalty is an acknowledgment of restraint shown by moral and/or social superiors toward inferiors—which reason can show to be irrational, since the inferiors’ interests would invariably be better served by rejection of hierarchical social arrangements. Thus, loyalty decreases utility for the loyal agent and his or her kind.

To the first of these two attacks on the utility of loyalty, I argue that as we have seen, loyalty need not be construed as a mere sentimental attachment to the familiar. If someone demands loyal behavior from us, we expect that person to have something more to appeal for support than mere familiarity. He or she must be able to point to something he or she has done for us. Family relationships, for example, engender loyalty not because family members are familiar but because they exchange services and share values. Community loyalties arise in a similar fashion. Thus, we need not assume that loyalty is merely an uncalculating prejudice in favor of our own traditional tastes or practices.

The second attack has a certain foundation in past usage which cannot be denied. Throughout Western history the relation of benefactor to beneficiary has overlapped with and indeed been conflated with the relationships of superior to inferior. Thus, we find philosophers as diverse as Aristotle²⁰ and Kant²¹ recommending self-sufficiency to the would-be moral agent to avoid the inferiority they each believed was implicit in the acceptance of favors. In hierarchical societies, of course, the two sorts of relationships often went hand in hand. Children, servants, and vassals typically received important benefits from their parents, employers, and liege lords—who happened also to be their social superiors. Thus, it is easy to make the mistake of supposing that loyalty to parents, employers, and lords must be a response to their superior status. But clearly, superiority that is never exercised to the benefit of others is neither necessary nor sufficient to make its possessor an object of gratitude or loyalty. The parent, employer, or lord must actually have done the child, servant, or vassal some good. *Loyalty*, as defined above, reinforces benevolence, not domination. Thus, members of cooperative communities, even multicultural communities, have reason to value loyalty.

Even so, loyalties can be sources of disorder within communities. Multicultural societies are made up of individuals whose loyalties sometimes prove incompatible or require mutually exclusive social practices. We must expect that stewards of nature will sometimes be motivated by differing loyalties which lead them to promote competing and incompatible environmental

¹⁹ Marcia Baron, “Loyalty,” in Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, eds., *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, vol. 2 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), p. 753. John Ladd offered a similar view in “Loyalty,” in Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 5 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 97–98.

²⁰ See, e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985).

²¹ See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980.)

policies.²² Unless the projects in question rest on false beliefs either about the services which the loyal agent is acknowledging or about the efficacy of the means adopted to do so, it may be impossible to judge one, morally speaking, either better or worse or more or less significant than the other. The only solution will be a compromise between the parties by appeal to other or higher loyalties or values. This solution, of course, does not distinguish loyalty from other virtues such as charity or mercy, which may likewise cause individuals to pursue competing and mutually exclusive charitable or merciful projects.

V. THE UPSHOT

In a response to critics who argue that novel theories of natural values are unnecessary because more creative cost-accounting provides sufficient reasons for preserving natural resources, Leopold remarks, “when the logic of history hungers for bread and we hand out a stone, we are at pains to explain how much the stone resembles bread.”²³ In trying to focus attention on the potential of traditional human-centered virtues to motivate effective stewardship of the environments we inhabit, I am not trying to make a stone pass for bread. I do not claim, for instance, that the development of a character strongly marked by benevolence and loyalty will always be sufficient to motivate us to care for nature. To those who believe both that we need to embrace nonanthropocentric principles of value if we are ever to respond adequately to human threats to the environment and that theoretical justification of such principles can move us to act upon them, what I have to offer is certainly not the loaf they desire. But for the reasons given above, I do not consider this limitation to be a fatal flaw in my approach.

I agree with Leopold that effective environmental stewardship of the natural world cannot occur if we see it only as a resource for maximizing economic gains. We need instead to develop a greater sensitivity to the noneconomic needs, values, and interests that natural entities and environments serve if we are to develop enduring commitments to preserve them. We need, in other words, more and better stewards of the natural world. And to develop more and better stewards we need a better understanding of how our own self-love and love for our kind can supply the motivation necessary for us to make the sacrifices involved.

²² The debate over how to manage feral pigs in Hawaii gives us an example of such phenomena.

²³ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 210.