

# Anthropocentrism Vs Nonanthropocentrism



**WHY SHOULD WE CARE?**  
**BY KATIE MCSHANE**

# Argument/Support



## Argument:

- Even if we grant the truth of Norton's convergence hypothesis, there are good reasons to worry about anthropocentric ethics.
  - ✦ This assumed under the condition that both anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric ethics converge when it comes to the policies and behaviors they recommend

## Support

1. Ethics are concerned about not only actions but also how one feels when performing the action
2. Anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism have differences in how we feel
3. With anthropocentrism, we are wrong in seeing the value of the natural world with attitudes of love, respect, and awe.

# Key Definitions



- **Anthropocentrism:** the view that the nonhuman world has value only because it directly or indirectly serves human interests
- **Nonanthropocentrism:** denial of anthropocentrism; the view that it isn't the case that the nonhuman world has value only because it directly or indirectly serves human interests.
- **Norton's 'convergence hypothesis':** the claim that both anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric ethics will recommend the same environmentally responsible behaviors and policies.

# Nonanthropocentrism



One can deny Anthropocentrism and claim:

- That the value of every organism depends on the contribution it makes to the health of its ecosystem
- That the value of every nonconscious being depends on whether conscious beings happen to care about it
- That is no such thing as intrinsic value at all
- Not committed to intrinsic value of nonhuman or human entities

# Practical Implication



- “What I want to explore here is the question of what counts as ‘practical implication’ of a theory. In practical ethics, we often talk as though ethical questions are just questions about which actions to take or which actions to adopt. There is, however, a long history in ethics of being concerned with questions of how to **feel**, what attitudes to take toward different things in the world, which things to care about and how to care about them.” (170)
- This is where she wishes to examine the significance the differences between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism have on feel.

# Anthropocentrism and Feelings



## Anthropocentrism

- Nature valuable in how it serves human interests
- Those human interests lead us to care about nature
- This leads to our actions of protecting nature in order to protect our own human interests

## Feelings

- 3 considerations
  1. Our feelings affect the way we act (if ethics cares how we act, it ought to care how we feel)
  2. Matters of feeling are an important part of what we care about in our social relationships
  3. Questions of how to feel are also central in thinking about how to direct our own lives

## Ethical Norms:

- Norms of Action (what we ought to do)
- Norms for feeling (how we ought to feel)
  - ✦ Could be limited by actions allowed in anthropocentrism

# Anthropocentrism and the incompatibility with love, respect, and awe in nature



- These feelings towards things are not compatible with our the thinking that its value depends on its service to human interest
- These feelings are not compatible with seeing things as solely valuable in serving our interests

## Feelings:

### ○ Love

- ✦ Loving one's friend under anthropocentrism reduces that person's value to how he/she serves your interests
- ✦ She claims that if this individual did not serve your interests than he/she would have no value
- ✦ She claims that love is an other-centered emotion (beyond what an something can do for you)
  - Having a value independent of you

### ○ Awe

- ✦ Being in awe is something has greatness beyond your interests
- ✦ Could be seen also as the indifference to our interests

### ○ Respect

- ✦ Accepting something for its own interests

# Feelings towards nature



- Discusses feelings of love, awe, and respect that authors state about nature
  - Loving an animal as a companion
  - Are these right? Most think so
- Anthropocentrism says that we are making a mistake in having these feelings towards nature
  - Should avoid theories in which these feelings will be considered a mistake, such is the case with anthropocentrism



# Conclusion



- There are practical differences between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism that we must take into account when dealing with ethics in nature.
  - “While anthropocentrism can tell me how to act as though something has value in its own right when I know it doesn’t, it’s much less clear that anthropocentrism can tell me to feel as though something has value in its own right even when I know it doesn’t.” (176)

# Objections/Questions



- McShane says that she accepts the convergence thesis for sake of argument, but can this really be accepted? Does the convergence thesis have weight?
- She argues on the condition that anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric actions would create the same outcomes when anthropocentric principles were on par with nonanthropocentric ones. Is that realistic?
- McShane's nonanthropocentrism question: If the center is not on humans, then is there a center of something else? Should there be?
- Are the aforementioned attitudes (love, awe, respect) not compatible with anthropocentrism as McShane suggests? Or is she wrong?
- Are these feelings really being considered as mistakes through an anthropocentric view?