

Moral Considerability for Non-Sentient Life:

Duties to Wild and Domesticated Plants

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In

Philosophy

by

Varia Ley Garon

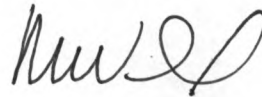
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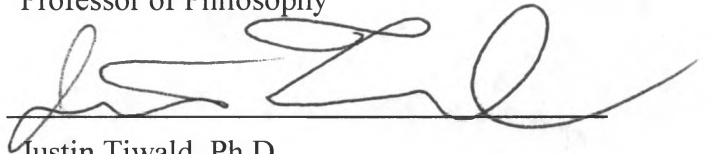
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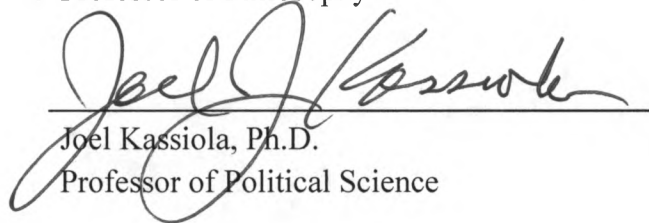
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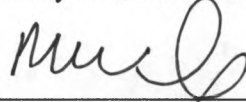
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MORAL CONSIDERABILITY FOR NON-SENTIENT LIFE:
DUTIES TO WILD AND DOMESTICATED PLANTS

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San Francisco, California
2017

In this thesis, I will argue that moral agents have both positive and negative duties to plants. Though sentience has been a benchmark for moral consideration, I argue that non-sentient life is capable of well-being, and that we ought to promote their good. I employ a process in which one first considers whether a response to a particular object is rational, then which prescriptions of value are justified by that response. I establish a rational link between individual life and the responses of awe, humility, and gratitude of which respect, preservation, protection, and affection are rational prescriptions of value. I argue that there is a presumptive negative duty not to harm, which only sometimes includes the duty not to kill. When it comes to wild plants, I argue that that justice demands that agents also observe positive duties of reparation or aid only when they cause unjustified harm to plants. Agents have many positive duties to domesticated plants grounded in their domestication. We have duties to provide for them, and end exploitative practices and institutions. I end by acknowledging that this argument is but one facet of moral concern, but that all agents must be attentive to whether or not their relationships are exploitative and unjust.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

12-14-16

Date

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INTRODUCTION

In Environmental Ethics, much attention has been paid to the question of whether other animals, often other mammals specifically, have moral status. The issue has not been conclusively settled, but a robust dialogue concerning the definition and criteria for moral considerability has developed. Most philosophers cite sentience and experiential capacities as the most viable evidence that at least some non-human animals have a moral status that grounds direct duties to them for the sake of their own well-being. While this work is philosophically interesting and important, this thesis will argue that it overlooks other important considerations, namely ones that could ground moral obligations and duties to non-sentient life as well. Specifically, I will argue that plants have the potential for well-being, and that rational reflection can ground prescriptions of value that justify the moral consideration of plants by human moral agents. Once moral patienthood is plausibly established, I will argue for positive and negative duties grounded in the specific relationships between humans and domestic or wild plants.

In Part One I will justify a plausible answer to the question of whether or not we have direct moral duties to non-sentient life at all, in the sense of promoting their well-being for their own sake. I understand “moral status” as a conceptual designation that something is worthy of moral consideration for its own sake, not for instrumental

reasons, usually expressed by calling something a moral patient or moral agent. I will begin by criticizing the capacities-based animal rights approach, in order to identify problems with capacities based considerations of moral status. Then I will posit my account of moral considerability that grants non-sentient life, in this thesis plants specifically, the status of moral patienthood. I draw on Elizabeth Anderson's argument that capacities within social contexts can ground moral duties, as opposed to capacities on their own. I assume a constructivist¹ account of morality, in the sense that any normative prescriptions that we judge to be true are products of rational deliberation as opposed to agent independent truths that are discoverable in the world. For this reason, I attempt to ground the values I discuss by showing how they are rational responses and ways of valuing by moral agents. In Part Two, I will consider some actual relationships between humans and wild or domestic plants, to ground specific positive and negative duties. I draw on Clare Palmer's work from her book, *Animal Ethics in Context*, to explain the significance of the causal relationships humans have to plants, which structure our considerations and generate duties to them. I will now begin with my criticisms of

¹ I will not give a thorough argument for constructivism itself, though I note the considerable controversy over whether constructivism is a tenable position in metaethics. I use the term, not so much as a metaethical claim about the reality of moral truths, but to suggest my epistemic skepticism in regards to what we can know about moral truths. In short, I remain agnostic on the realism/anti-realism debate as I do not think we have the ability to know whether or not there are mind-independent moral values and what they are. So, I take constructivism to designate a middle position, in which I do not accept complete relativism as strong anti-realists do, or try to establish mind-independent values as strong realists do. However, insofar as some anti-realist positions are not practically relativistic, and some realist positions do not assert mind-independent values they might be compatible with this view as well, which I do not think requires a constructivist background specifically.

capacities based views, specifically those that require sentience to justify the status of moral patienthood.

PART ONE

I. Understanding Moral Status and Moving Beyond Experiential Well-Being

In the Western philosophical tradition, intrinsic value has often been reserved for the rational at its most exclusive, to the human, and to the sentient. Though there are theories, like those in the biocentric tradition, that are more expansive, sentience is taken as a clear marker of moral status. I understand sentience to designate experiential capacities, such that something can suffer or feel some sort of joy or happiness. Theories extending moral status to non-human animals tend to focus on capacities because capacities can be abstracted in a way that forces us to forget our prejudices. For example, Tom Regan, among others, uses the argument from marginal cases (AMF) to establish animal rights. The argument roughly says that some or all animals have the same level of cognitive capacities as humans to whom we grant moral rights even though they lack some cognitive abilities like rational reflection, namely infants and the cognitively impaired (Anderson 280). So, to be consistent, we must grant the same rights based on the same capacities, otherwise we are arbitrarily favoring humans over other animals. In this way Regan is able to extend the moral status of patienthood to non-human animals along with the rights such a status entitles them to when granted to humans. While such

abstraction is useful in some cases, it can also blind us to contextual details resulting in an unnecessary homogenization of the duties grounded in moral status.

Take, for example, a case of consent. Humans without a certain level of cognitive ability are usually considered incapable of meaningful consent. In general, it is uncontroversial to assert that a third grader cannot give sexual consent, making it wrong to have sex with the child, on whom it is a grievous assault both physically and psychologically. Pigs have similar cognitive abilities to third graders, and while we might assume that it would be wrong for a human to have sex with the pig for the same reason it would be wrong to have sex with the third grader, namely that it constitutes rape, we wouldn't say that the pig's lack of consent makes it intolerable for it to have sex at all, as we would with the third grader. This example² is just to show that identifying a capacity, in this case a level of cognitive ability, does not automatically ground the same rights, in this case the right not to be harmed understood specifically as the right not to be sexually assaulted. It is not only similarities or differences in capacities that ground duties or rights, rather there are also species-specific goods, important individual interests, and relationships that determine which duties we ought to recognize (Anderson 283). The problem with the AMF, and with strictly capacities based approaches in general, is that they are too abstract and can lead us to wrongly assign rights or duties.

² Elizabeth Anderson makes this criticism of AMF, though with a different example. I choose to give this example because it involves a negative right, which maps more closely onto Regan's approach, whereas hers is of a positive, and arguable, right to learn language. (281)

My critique highlights the homogenizing effects of capacities driven views, which I also argue is detrimental to our understanding of moral status in general. As I have previously stated, I understand moral patienthood to designate that a being is given moral consideration for its own sake, and that moral agents will modify their actions and beliefs about such beings accordingly. A capacities driven view lends itself to the assumption that we can identify a threshold capacity for moral patienthood altogether, which entitles one to a set stock of basic rights or entitlements. Not only would this be misguided, as illustrated above, but it can also make the recognition of moral patienthood over-demanding very quickly. I believe this concern with over-demandingness drives many to try and draw a line at sentience out of concern for the absurdity of recognizing the same basic duties to non-sentient beings as sentient ones. I hope to have shown that moral agents will not necessarily have the same duties to all moral patients, and that the same duties will not necessarily be generated by exactly the same criteria. By pulling apart capacities and specific duties, there are a plurality of avenues to moral patienthood, with a nuanced understanding of which duties will be recognized for specific patients or across relevantly similar groups of patients. Though there may be other concerns, absurdity or over-demandingness in the attribution of sets of duties based on moral status should not be one of them. I will argue for specific positive and negative duties in Part Two based on this understanding.

Having argued against a strictly capacities based approach to moral status, due to a tendency toward homogenization based on abstraction, I will now argue against

sentience as a specific capacity requirement for moral patienthood. I will begin by explaining the well-being of non-sentient life. Its well-being is constituted by capacities necessary for functioning, especially the ability for self-movement which allows it to do well for itself, and by its serious interests³. Serious interests capture the level of functioning, and the supportive context in which a being not only has its necessities fulfilled, but is also in good health and is flourishing. Plants, for example, need certain macronutrients, sunlight and water to grow at all, but in order to fully thrive they need other micronutrients, protections from pests, specific amounts of sunlight and water etc. Just as we would not say that a human who has barely enough water and food to survive day by day is in a state of well-being, I maintain that a plant that only has its most basic needs met is not either. All living beings have at minimum this basis of material well-being, and the absence of psychological components cannot erase the possibility of well-being altogether. What this does mean is that that non-sentient beings will not *take* an interest in their own well-beings, but that does not entail that moral agents who are capable of understanding interests and needs should not take such an interest either.

A prescription of respect for individual life is famously defended by Paul Taylor, based on his argument that all living beings are, “equally teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unified system of goal-oriented activities directed toward their preservation and well-being” (Taylor 108). His point is that all life is equally valuable and has the possibility of well-being, constituted roughly in the way I have described

³ This is a basic definition of well-being based on the Aristotelian, see Card (2004).

above. This is Taylor's grounds for moral consideration, but this fact alone does not entail that moral agents should take an interest in the well-being of other life⁴, a concern expressed in James O'Neil's point: "That Y is a good of X does not entail that Y should be realized unless we have some prior reason for believing that X is the sort of thing whose good ought to be promoted," (Palmer 19). To satisfy this point, I will now give a positive account of prescriptions to promote the good of individual life, grounded in rational valuative responses.

II. Reflective Valuation as a Justification for Moral Considerability

Elizabeth Anderson argues for a way to evaluate our valuing responses through rational reflection, in order to establish what kind of prescriptions are justified by responses to the inherent characteristics of a being. According to Anderson, "to be valuable is to be the proper object of a rational favorable attitude" (Anderson 291). Favorable attitudes are positive emotional dispositions, including beliefs, deliberations and actions oriented toward the object of value; they are rational if normative standards exercise reflective control over such responses (Anderson 291). This means that we must not only identify what our values are, but what grounds them, and whether or not we

⁴ Taylor grounds considerability for wild plants in his principle of consideration, which states that membership in Earth's community is grounds for consideration by moral agents, and his principle of intrinsic value, which states that membership in Earth's community of life makes the realization of its good intrinsically valuable. The combination of consideration and intrinsic worth means that agents must promote the good of all living beings for its own sake. While Taylor's view overlaps with my own significantly, my aims are different in two respects. Firstly, I will argue for duties to wild and domesticated plants, whereas Taylor only focuses on wild ones. Secondly, I seek to give a more detailed justification for why inherent qualities ground prescriptions of value that justify moral consideration. Perhaps my argument can serve as an expansion or precursor to Taylor's principles.

think our valuative response is one that actually fits the target. For some things this is easy, like when I justify my liking donuts because they taste good to me. In this case my personal taste is enough to justify my liking donuts. However, when it comes to moral valuations personal opinion is no longer sufficient because such valuations ground prescriptions that we think others ought to follow as well. In these cases, we need to give some justification to ground prescriptions.

Some skeptics might argue that there are no improper objects of emotional response, and therefore no proper objects either. Anderson rejects this view with the example of fear; the proper object of fear is danger or threat to oneself or something/one they care about. When someone feels fear and there is no such danger or threat we would deem it irrational, and say they, ideally, ought not feel fear in this situation (Anderson 291). We have good reason to recognize the proper objects of emotions in at least some cases, as they shape our actions. This example also serves to highlight why normative assessment and reflective control justifies specific responses, namely that in the case where emotion is trained on its proper object, we ought to respond in accordance. In the case of fear, if there is a threat or danger defensive action in response to the object of fear is justified, and we could expect that another person should also be afraid and defensive. In the case where there is no proper object, there would be nothing to respond defensively to, and responses by others would target the one feeling the irrational fear.

One might be concerned that by reflectively acknowledging that some valuations are rational, we might begin to marginalize those assumed to be irrational. This could happen in response to actual irrational values, or when we are mistaken about whether or not there is a proper object. Testimonial injustice⁵ is an example of the latter issue, such as when women's discomfort or anger was dismissed before the concept of workplace sexual harassment was accepted. I want to be clear that marginalization is not a necessary consequence of making reflective evaluations and prescriptions about value. We must always be on the lookout for problematic biases and prejudices, especially if we are passing judgement on another's testimony or belief. Even in the case where a valuation is appropriately deemed irrational, respect and empathy for fellow persons clearly dictate that we should not simply dismiss the person actually feeling it, unless there is very good reason to do so. There are many explanations for why people feel irrationally, often based on factors out of our control, so holding a person strictly accountable for their feelings makes little sense. I take Anderson's argument to clarify what we ought to base prescriptions of moral value on, not how we ought to treat those in different valuative states, or what we ought to expect a specific individual to actually be feeling at a certain time.

When it comes to establishing prescriptions of value based on inherent qualities, I find this approach appealing for several reasons. Firstly, is that it is not entirely subjective. There are two levels of reasoning that must be satisfied in order to make a

⁵ See Fricker (2007)

prescription. One must identify that there is a proper object for a response, and that prescriptions based on this response are rational. We can imagine scenarios where one or the other of these criteria are satisfied, and are individually coherent, however we would not want to base a prescription off of it. In the case of no proper object, an individual could prescribe rationally based on a genuinely felt emotion, but we would not prescribe this response to others. When there is a proper object but an individual responds irrationally, again we would not prescribe this to others. So, this view requires that valuation meet certain standards that can then be generalized, and avoids the entirely subjective individual coherence that constitutes strict relativism.

Secondly, it does not automatically ground a specific course of moral action, which was problematic in the capacities driven cases above. Based on Anderson's view, an inherent quality, which might be a capacity, does play a role in establishing moral duties, but the role is to ground a reason for moral consideration, not to ground a specific duty. This view *requires* that we take contextual factors into account as well, since the justifications this process provides is only useful in evaluating our prescriptions of value, rather than actually generating specific prescriptions of moral duties.

I will now consider some responses to plants, and defend their provision of a rational basis for prescriptions of respect, affection, preservation and protection. I will begin with Anderson's own example of ecosystems. She says that when we observe individual organisms and recognize their interdependency with a diverse and complex

array of others, it gives us intimations of the infinite. The infinite constitutes the sublime, to use a term of art, which is the proper object of awe, so awe is a rational response to nature (Anderson 293). This clearly demonstrates step one of the criteria argued above, identifying the proper object of a response, in this case ecosystems as grand and seemingly infinite are proper objects of awe. The question then, is what this response justifies in terms of a prescription of value.

Anderson says that awe serves to justify a desire to preserve and protect its object, and so justifies our wanting to preserve and protect ecosystems, “in [their] full integrity and complexity” (293). She does not give a detailed explanation of why protection and preservation are rational responses to awe, perhaps because it seems almost a matter of common sense that in the face of something awesome, one does not seek its destruction. Still, it is not entirely clear why preservation and protection are the right prescriptions. If there is no danger from humans to an ecosystem, these prescriptions make little rational sense. For example, animistic pagan traditions were widespread in the time before both the agricultural and industrial revolution, when humans had little impact on the earth. Without some of the knowledge and technology we have today, humans were totally at the mercy of nature and it may have seemed rational to prescribe worship as they did. Today, in a scientifically dominated post-industrial era, worship of nature has largely fallen wayward in areas that embrace this paradigm, like the United States. With our understanding of ecological processes, we realize that natural systems are probably not intentionally doing anything to help or hurt us. So, while awe is still a rational response to

the seemingly infinite number of interdependent individuals involved in ecosystemic processes, we have *some* understanding of what these systems are and of our relation within them, and technological power that insulates us from some natural dangers. Worship is not a rationally justified prescription of value, but preservation and protection are, considering that our current context is one of rampant human destruction of nature.

This adds an important clarification to Anderson's view of what justifies prescriptions of value. I interpret her explanation to allow that context plays a role not only in determining specific duties, but in judging which prescriptions of value are rational for a context. Not only must a response fit its proper object, but the prescription of value must fit the response in a context. My prescriptions of value are made within the limits of my understanding constituted by our contemporary context. One could argue that nature has never actually had intentions toward humanity for good or ill, so worship was never really a rational prescription for that reason, but I cannot pretend to give any ahistorical or immutable prescriptions. I will justify prescriptions based on what I think is rational for our current context. That context, in brief, is one which is driven by scientific enquiry and in which the global economic influence of for-profit capitalism and materialism stimulate the destruction of our natural environment through the use of technology. The result is the over-use of natural resources, and increasing global disparity in access to natural recourses usually favoring the most affluent societies.

In our current context, awe justifies the prescription that we ought to preserve and protect ecosystems to some extent, as one we can reasonably defend without relying solely on instrumental concerns for how ecosystems preserve the lives of humans, because the individuals in these ecosystems face severe damage by humans. To be sure, the motivation is still anthropogenic because it comes from our human valuative responses, but it is not anthropocentric because it is based on a quality inherent to ecosystems made up of individuals, rather than of purely instrumental value for human flourishing. This method is one that allows for a plurality of values, though establishment of this prescription of value is not automatically overriding of other values and prescriptions that may conflict with it. The initial prescription of value is but one element in our construction of particular prescriptions for action, and in real situations many values will be weighed alongside contextual factors to decipher the right course of action. Anderson herself admits that this method gives no easy answers, something that I find to be a strength in the ethical theory, because it resists over-generalization.

Based on what I have argued so far, it may be unclear at whose well-being this prescription is targeted, and could be taken as a holistic or biocentric individualist approach. Holistic approaches, like that attributed to Aldo Leopold in "The Land Ethic" are sometimes criticized as promoting the good of a community or system and preserving the "balance of nature," over the good of individuals. I do not assert any commitments to

the community itself⁶ above and beyond its significance for the flourishing of individuals within it, as Leopold is taken to do. I focus on the values of individuals, which can be promoted through preservation and protection of the supportive contexts and systems in which they live. So, while I will talk about prescriptions of preservation and protection of ecosystems, these are stimulated by individuals and are valuable as necessary to the well-being of those individuals within them. With this in mind, I will now consider humility as a fitting response to plants.

We are but one small part of the biotic system upon which we rely very much, and upon which we can have profound effects. Humility is fitting when we are vulnerable or fallible, and recognizing our own interdependence with other individuals in a biotic community properly stimulates this feeling. Even though humans have become very good at avoiding being the hunted, we may in some cases still be prey for other animals⁷, and are subject to a variety of diseases with no known cure. We also require food, clean air, and fresh water which are all made possible by the ecosystems in which we live. The fact of our dependence and relative powerlessness is revealed to us when we observe individual plants because we see a very different kind of life, one that we still rely on,

⁶ This may or may not be a correct interpretation of Leopold. As J. Baird Callicott says in defense, "...our recognition of the biotic community and our immersion in it does not imply that we do not also remain members of the human community...or that we are relieved of the attendant and correlative moral responsibilities of that membership" (183). However, this still requires a justification of duties to a community itself as well, which I do not give.

⁷ See Plumwood (1996)

though sometimes in indirect ways, and which has similar kinds of needs and basic interests. This realization makes humility an apt response.

If this state of affairs in the world justifies our humility, then humility justifies the prescription that we ought to live respectfully and carefully within our biotic community/ies, by taking care with what effects our actions have so as not to be overly destructive. This may strike some as an instrumental concern, since much of what I just mentioned are ways in which humans need ecosystems to survive, and so it would appear self-interested. I am in no way trying to deny that self-interest plays a part in our moral deliberation, but humility is stimulated precisely because when faced with another living being, we are reminded that we are just one small member of complex system. Cheng Hao, a Neo-Confucian master, speaks of a man named Zhou Dunyi, who when asked why he did not cut the grass outside his window said that he felt about the grass as he did about himself⁸. The point I take is that Zhou Dunyi realized a profound similarity in his own existence and in the grass's. I believe this realization is motivated by humility, which allows us to recognize our fundamental interdependence shared with other members of the community. Humility does not erase important differences between Zhou Dunyi and the grass, but it helps us to recognize that we are not justified in assuming that we have dominion or discretionary control over other living individuals. Zhou Dunyi demonstrates this by refusing to cut the grass when he has no need to do so. To cut the

⁸ see Zhu and Lü (1963/2008).

grass for no good reason, is to demonstrate unjustified dominance, the opposite of humility. I take this dominance to be unjustified⁹, even though we have tremendous power due to technological innovation and the sheer number of humans on the earth at this time, due to what I assume is a general consensus in ethical philosophy that “might makes right” is not a good moral justification¹⁰. The fact of our moral agency does not entail superior status, because what is relevant about agency is our ability to take responsibility and shape our own actions, not to exercise unrestrained power at will. Even if one could establish superiority, a just ruler is beholden to their communities. Since we do not definitively have the knowledge or power to adequately provide for the Earth’s communities, we are not qualified to be rulers. This understanding does not mean that we can never focus on human-specific needs, rather it shows that doing so is appropriate when we are in situation that justify our acting on duties to individuals of our own species. Humility is the basis for this rejection of domination, and acceptance of the prescription to respect other life.

Humility grounds a prescription to be respectful of the lives of individual plants, and to preserve and protect their well-being because they remind us of the fragility and dependence of our own lives within our interdependent biotic community, as well as the

⁹ Paul Taylor also uses interdependence to argue against human superiority, by saying that we cannot establish why the telos of one being is more important, fundamentally, than that of another. So, when we are in these interdependent communities and see that other beings are teleological in their own way as co-members, the assertion of human superiority is an expression of bias (Taylor 108-109).

¹⁰ Karen Warren argues against what she calls the “logic of domination” which asserts that superiority justifies subordination (159). She criticizes this by saying that differences do not automatically ground superiority and inferiority, and that even when superiority is established, the status alone does not justify subordinating or oppressing others.

limits to our knowledge and power. I use respect as a way of describing attentiveness and care to a being's needs and existence as opposed to egoistic indifference or domination, not to show esteem of character. One of the difficulties in talking about respect is that it can have many proper objects, and that it is often tied to different emotional responses. I can have respect in the form of consideration or deference, which may be based in fear. For this reason, I give the same respect, by keeping my distance, to a poisonous plant that I would to a bear ahead on the trail. This respect is grounded in qualities inherent to the object, in this case that it is poisonous. However, I could also show respect for tender wildflowers, by carefully stepping around them or staying on an established trail so as not to disturb their growth and possibly destroy them. Sometimes the evaluation is beyond my control, such as in the case of the poisonous plant, and other times I can choose to tread carefully around wildflowers or walk all over them, but both are grounded in humble recognition of my place in an interdependent community. Next I will consider gratitude.

The proper object of gratitude is something beneficial that one either did not expect or did not create for themselves. There is some debate about the differences between gratitude *for* and gratitude *to*¹¹. As gratitude *for* is sufficient for my point I will not discuss the difference. To again emphasize interdependence, we do not create most of the natural objects we rely upon, like living soil to grow food, drinkable water, or what we consider beneficial or good, like rock faces amenable to climbing. So, we are often in

¹¹See Manela (2015)

positions where gratitude, in the sense of appreciation or gladness, is justified. Legitimate feelings of gratitude make prescriptions of good will or affection reasonable, so it is reasonable to act according to these feelings when it comes to plants. Gratitude may be especially apparent in response to particular plants, such as those we personally grow for food. When picking tomatoes from a roof garden, or plucking herbs from a window sill, our gratitude for these living beings stimulates good will toward them. Other times we may be grateful for their beauty, or grateful for the systems that allow us to thrive interdependently, and so be grateful for the individuals that co-constitute it. In a context where humans act out of entitlement and are wasteful and destructive of nature, gratitude also grounds prescriptions of preservation and protection.

To review, I have been giving these examples of reasonable valuative response as an answer to the concern that we need a reason for why we ought to promote the good of something, other than simply knowing that it has a good. I hope to have given plausible examples of reasonable valuative responses that ground prescriptions to feel and act toward plants in ways that do justify our promoting their individual goods, sometimes through the preservation and protection of ecosystems which we all rely upon. If we have acceptable reasons to promote their good, then we have reasons to modify our behaviors and beliefs in relation to plants for their own sake, thereby rendering them proper patients of our moral deliberations and actions. They are, therefore, morally considerable, as the prescriptions I have discussed above are about responses to the plants themselves, not to other moral patients or agents whom the plants affect. With these prescriptions in mind, I

will now consider some specific relational cases, and how these contextual factors along with the value prescriptions above, ground specific duties to non-sentient life.

PART TWO

I. Relationships and Duties, both Positive and Negative

In part one I established a plausible grounding for the moral patienthood of non-sentient life, specifically plant life, in answer to the question of why we ought to promote their well-being at all. By reflecting on which responses fit plant life as its proper object, I justified some prescriptions of value as rational responses in our current context. Since that context is one in which humans engage in widespread destruction of natural life and their supportive contexts, responses like humility, gratitude, and awe reasonably generate prescriptions of respect, preservation, protection, and sometimes affection. In this section I will develop an account of specific moral duties grounded in contextual relational factors in conjunction with the prescriptions of value argued for above.

The prescriptions of value I have argued for rely heavily on humans' interdependence within a biotic community, of which we are members not rulers. This distinction is important because it means that we must look carefully at our relationships to determine when we are justified in giving greater weight to our interests, and when we are not, just as we must do so when we make these distinctions within human society. In Clare Palmer's book, *Animal Ethics in Context*, she gives a detailed account of the various relationships, which give rise to moral duties between moral agents and patients. In

general, “relation” includes, “*having an effect, potentially having an effect, or having had an effect* on another, or the *existence of an interaction* between one being and another, such that the effect or interaction makes a difference in states of affairs,” (Palmer, 48, author’s emphasis). This definition opens up a multitude of ways in which humans can be in relationships. There are affectional, causal, and contractual relations that must be taken into account, and these relationships can exist interpersonally and along permeable boundaries of human society and species boundaries. I will focus on causal relationships in this paper, as contracts cannot be agreed to by non-consensual beings, and affectional relationships will not always apply to human-plant interactions. What gives the existence of relationships *ethical* significance, is when they involve moral agents interacting with other moral agents or patients (Palmer 23). I have spent Part One arguing for the moral status of non-sentient life, to show that the causal relationships between humans and plants ground duties to them.

When I speak of duties I mean positive and negative prescriptions of what we ought to do in relation to a specific moral patient. A positive duty is something that we ought to do, or in other words is the morally right thing to do, and a negative one is something that we should refrain from doing, it is morally right that we not do it. Though duties are commonly ascribed to deontic accounts, I use duties as a somewhat flexible concept that lends itself to different moral frameworks, and so can be employed by the rights or virtue theorist, for example. Though I avoided naming specific duties in Part One, there is a basic presumptive duty that can be inferred from the prescriptions to respect, preserve,

and protect plants, which is the negative duty not to harm. This duty is entailed by respectful consideration of a plant's well-being, and the preservation and protection of it or its environment, and it can be presumptively applied to all plants. That being said, the moral framework I argue for is still one of a plurality of values, so there will be cases in which this presumptive duty is overridden by other duties. Still, it may seem immediately over-demanding to assert even this presumptive duty to plants. I will now attempt to mitigate this worry by arguing for why killing is not always a violation of the duty not to harm when it comes to non-sentient life.

II. Killing and Harm

Killing would seem to be the most serious harm one could do to a living being, and the right to life is typically included as the most basic or fundamental right one could give to a moral patient. I have already said that I am not arguing for a rights per se, but a presumptive duty not to harm seems to practically assert such a right. I will argue that in many cases killing and death are not harms to plants. Firstly, it is my assumption that the state of being dead itself is not a harm to the individual who is dead. There may be harms done in the act of killing, and the justification or lack thereof for the killing, but once dead the beings that are harmed are those that care about the dead individual and possibly those in the society that has to justify killing. Otherwise, death is a natural end to life, and is inevitable for all mortal beings. Plants, just like humans, have specific lifespans, usually within some average for their species. In the case of many plants, this span may be quite short. Specifically, many crops and flowers are annuals, and only live for the

growth period of a single year. So, many of the plants we kill on a regular basis are those who not only face imminent death, but produce fruits specifically to be appealing for consumption by animals that will spread their seeds so they can reproduce. Being eaten is just the natural lifecycle for many plants, and harvesting their fruits, and even tilling their withering stalks before they are fully dead is no more wrong than allowing an elderly or terminally ill person facing imminent death to be taken off of life support by their choosing.

Though I argued against the importance of sentience as a necessary feature for moral patienthood, I do not argue that it has no significance whatsoever. In the case of dying, the lack of a capacity to feel pain, fear, or anxiety of approaching death, in other words to lack the experiential capacities that constitute much of the harm of killing and dying, means that in many cases killing plants is not a harm at all. It is not a failure of respect for living beings to harvest plants who are no longer capable of flourishing and who are meant to be eaten.

Of course, not all plants are annuals, and some even live for hundreds or thousands of years. Their capacities and lifespans are importantly different from the ones I have just described. While their lack of experiential capacities takes away much of the harm of dying, I will concede that in these cases a presumptive duty not to harm does include a presumptive duty not to kill. This duty is established by respect for their well-being, and their continuing capacity to flourish, but it is importantly different than a strict right to

life. In the case of plants, the lack of experiential capacities and concern for conscious autonomy means that justifications for killing are going to be less strict than for a sentient being who has a conscious interest in its own life and serious goals. Some justification is required nonetheless, and I will now argue for how the presumptive duty not to harm applies to wild plants, alongside other duties.

III. Wild Plants

When I use the term “wild,” am referring to plants who are not dependent on, or subject to, human control. Though humans sometimes come into contact with these plants, they live their lives largely or entirely independent of humans. Their means of survival and flourishing are not provided for by humans or human societies. When it comes to nature, wilderness designates land that has not been developed for human use. Wildness comes in degrees, and can be seen as one end of a spectrum on which developed or civilized is the other extreme. These extremes do not always imply a vast physical distance between the two, as San Francisco is just a four and half hour drive from Yosemite, nor do wilderness and civilization always have strict boundaries. One can live in a rural area where the wilderness blends in with the edge of one’s own backyard.

The relationships human moral agents have to wild plants are similarly variable. There are species of jungle flora and fauna in such remote places that I may not know they exist, or may only see them by way of digital representation. There are many plants that may never be touched by a human being, and others, like the flowers of Tuolumne

Meadows in Yosemite, that are observed, photographed, and walked on by hundreds or thousands of people every summer. There are multiple ways in which humans are causally and affectionately connected to these wild plants, sometimes causing protection, such as by the establishment of preserves and National Parks. Other times we are agents of their destruction, such as when we trample flowers, or create dams that fill entire living valleys with water to provide for ourselves, or engage in consumerist activities that change the very climate living beings rely upon.

I have argued for a general presumptive duty not to harm plants, grounded in their capacity for life and well-being and reasonable prescriptions of value to respect, preserve and protect them. The negative duty not to harm, including the duty not to kill, is strongest when targeted at wild plants on whom we do not rely for some necessary or important interest. One should not cut down a five-hundred-year old sequoia just because it happens to be blocking a view of the lake from their cabin. Though one might have an interest in seeing the lake, it is not an interest that is of deep significance to one's well-being that can be used to justify the killing of a flourishing tree.

Respectful consideration of plants, and a duty not to harm also require us to modify our actions of turning wilderness into developed land. The way humans develop their societies is extremely destructive to plants, as well as animals. We bulldoze tracts of lands, ripping up all living matter, then pave over it with concrete or asphalt so none can grow. If there are ways we can design our societies to integrate with the natural

environment, and still function to sufficiently serve human projects and needs, then the duty not to harm requires our own self-restraint. That does not mean that even a society where plants are morally considered will not require us to cut down a few trees or clear a few vines, but these cases will be ones with a justification based on our own well-being, as opposed to ones of convenience or habit. If there are poisonous vines all around the areas I seek to live, I am justified in clearing the ones that pose a risk to my health. If I need some lumber to build shelters, I may be justified in cutting down some trees, but I should first forage for fallen ones, then cut down those that are in the process of dying as opposed to the sequoia with hundreds of years to live. Sometimes our development might cause irreparable damage to fragile local environments, which may require us to find somewhere else to develop, altogether if possible.

Most of our duties to wild plants can be exercised as restraint on destruction or unnecessary interference with these beings. However, one might wonder: if I am concerned with the well-being of a giant sequoia who has the ability to live on for hundreds of years, and I see that it has caught on fire somehow, shouldn't prescriptions of value also ground a duty to put the fire out and save the tree? In other words, what positive duties might I have to wild plant life? This concern comes not only from a concern for that individual being, but from a consequentialist perspective in which we wonder whether humans ought to actively promote flourishing to maximize well-being. Clare Palmer argues for limits to our duties to wild animals, and rejects consequentialist aims for maximization on the basis that it treats agents as impersonal moral actors, and

disregards individual well-being (Palmer 72-3). In other words, strict consequentialism is too demanding on moral agents to the point that it ignores¹² their own individual well-being which is constituted by needs and serious interests, like personal life projects that are autonomously chosen and pursued.

Palmer instead takes a more libertarian and deontic stance, arguing for what she calls the Laissez Faire Intuition (LFI), which acknowledges prima facie negative duties not to harm all animals, but maintains that there are no positive duties of assistance to wild animals, unless required by justice. Duties of justice only arise in situations where the intentions and actions of moral agents make them responsible for the state of a moral patient (Palmer 87-89). In regards to wild animals she explicitly states, "...but we have no duties to assist them, because their situation, even when they are suffering or starving, reflects no injustice, and no moral agents were involved in bringing it about" (Palmer 89). This applies to natural disasters, predation, and other non-moral harms out of agents' control. Insofar as I have established the moral patienthood of plants, I argue that the LFI is justified in regards to wild plants as well. It is compatible with my view, which encourages the weighing of pluralistic values including those of plant and human well-being.

¹² Palmer does acknowledge that there are some forms of weak consequentialism that allow for weighing agent prerogatives with duties to maximize the good, and that they *might* be made compatible with her theory (71).

Palmer defends this view by arguing for a distinction between harming and not assisting, even when the consequences are the same. In the case of harm, an agent is causing a being to be worse off, whereas in the case of non-assistance the agent hasn't caused anything and is just not making the being better off than it would be otherwise (Palmer 75). This is an important distinction if we are to respect the autonomy and well-being of moral agents, and allow them prerogatives in cases where justice does not dictate a positive duty of reparation or assistance due to some causal connection between agent and patient. When agents cause harm, they may be required to fulfill positive duties for reparation, and agents can sometimes choose to aid wild plants, so if an agent thinks it is good to make the lives of other beings better if they can, they are free to do so¹³.

In addition to Palmer's view, I would add some specific constraints on volitional aid, where the aid has to be given with some knowledge of the needs of the plant, and the consequences of such action in regards to the good of the being itself. For example, in Yosemite the forests naturally go through burn cycles, which clear underbrush, enrich soil, and control insect populations. For many years these burn cycles were not allowed to take their course, because they were seen as destructive to the forest, and potentially dangerous to campers. The result, of course, was a massive fire after years of

¹³ Palmer actually gives three versions of LFI, which are more or less restrictive when it comes to aid. I focus on what she calls "No-Contact" LFI because it allows for prerogative aid, and for positive duties grounded in causal harms (90). The only reason I see to restrict aid is based on consequential concerns of misapplied aid, and is inconsistent with her earlier argument. Furthermore, I think that protection of agent well-being is important, and needs to be protected, but I still want to leave room for virtue type accounts that promote the active aid of others for their benefit as something morally good, even if it is not required by justice.

undergrowth buildup that destroyed a huge part of the park, and did much more damage than any of the usual smaller fires would have. This is just to point out that we must be suspect of efforts to aid, as they can be misplaced due to ignorance, or motivated by selfish desires for a place to stay a certain way, unchanging, for our own enjoyment, comfort, or aesthetic pleasure. So while, I do not think there should be prohibitions on aid, it must be given carefully out of humble respect, attentive to our finite power and knowledge.

There are other cases, though, where aid or reparation is required because human action has caused so much destruction that entire ecosystems are being degraded. Reparation is usually granted to the wronged party, so it may seem impossible to ground such a duty when the harmed entity has already been destroyed. However, when parts of a fragile ecosystem are destroyed, it puts all of its members in danger and decreases their ability to flourish. Therefore, reparational efforts can be targeted at surviving members who may not be able to “bounce back” on their own.

To put this concretely, we can consider the current scenario in which large tracts of the rainforest are being obliterated every day by cattle ranching. Even supposing that cattle ranching itself is actually of vital interest to humans, the extent to which it is done far outstrips that need. The negative duty not to harm dictates that we find less destructive, and more sustainable ways to raise cattle. The impact on the destroyed forest affects many more plants, and animals, than just the ones being cleared. In regards to the

other individuals in the forest, positive duties of reparation require us to unpack the soil and help with the regrowth of that land. This can be distinguished from a situation where wildfire or disease is destroying part of a forest, and lack of anthropogenesis does not ground positive duties.

One might think that if global warming, which has widespread global effects, is human caused this grounds many reparational duties. What it certainly demonstrates, is that we are failing in our negative duty. Even if many of our actions are done in the justified interest of human well-being, the methods and scope of these activities, that may make the planet unlivable, cannot be justified. What is really required is our own self-control and the mitigation of our global impact. Though we may have some positive duties of aid or reparation, those efforts will be futile if we do not first stop the harm we are causing. If we think our duty is to solve every environmental problem that springs up because of global warming, we will become engaged in a perpetual game of whack-a-mole that chases the symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause. We should be concerned with the effects of human caused degradation, and we should recognize the moral wrongs we are perpetuating, but our response needs to first be one that meaningfully deals with the problem rather than one that potentially creates further dependencies and moral wrongs with short term aid.

I have argued that, in general, our most stringent duty to wild plants is the negative duty not to harm. Aid can be thoughtfully and carefully given, but is subject to

constraints. In some cases, positive duties of reparation or aid are grounded in human caused harm to wild plants or to their environments. In our current context, these duties are quite demanding because human destruction is so severe. Next I will consider our relationship to domesticated plants, where relationships of control and dependence ground many positive duties, as well as the negative duty not to harm.

IV. Domesticated Plants

Domesticated plants are unlike wild ones in the sense that they are dependent on human intervention to get adequate nutrients, water, and proper sunlight. Sometimes domesticated species could survive without humans if they were planted somewhere adequately suited to their needs, but many species have been bred in controlled conditions, making them too delicate, or too appealing to predators to survive or flourish in the wild. The character of domesticated plants as not only subject to, but constructed by and for human interests provide grounds for positive relational duties to them, as well as the presumptive duty not to harm. The kinds of plants humans keep in their homes or grow for food are often those for which killing would not be considered a harm. There are, however, a variety of positive duties owed to these plants based on their dependent status.

In their book, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka give an account of domestication, though they too stop at a subjective experiential threshold, and focus on animals. Domestication is a form of causal control

over the evolution and lives of individuals who are subject to the process. According to Donaldson and Kymlicka's definition, there are several separable components of domestication. Firstly, is purpose, and just as humans have domesticated animals for human needs or desires, so too have we domesticated plants. The second factor is the process of domestication, which involves a history of control over how, and in what ways, a being is able to exercise its capacities to survive and self-sustain, effectively integrating these plants into human society. Third is the treatment of domesticated individuals, which require continuous care and provision. And fourth is the state of domestication, which tracks how adapted domesticated beings are to human society, and so how dependent they are on continued inclusion (Donaldson and Kymlicka 75). All of these components track the ways in which domestication generates special concerns for the domesticated based on the causal relationships humans create by this practice. Though the originators of the process may be long dead, these arrangements are still manifest in ongoing relationships.

Donaldson and Kymlicka are interested in distinguishing these factors because they play a role in distinguishing whether relationships of domestication can be just ones, and how or whether they should continue (Donaldson and Kymlicka 88). For example, they find the purpose of domestication to be exploitative, if it is only for human benefit, but we could imagine domesticating a species with their interests taken into consideration as well (Donaldson and Kymlicka 75). This would characterize it as symbiotic rather than exploitative, and exploitation ought to be avoided because it does unjustified harm to

plants by disregarding their needs and interests. Similarly, we could imagine processes that are more or less detrimental to an individual's capacities, and cases where once domesticated, species are treated with more or less care. Dependency need not always be negative, or a means of oppression, so being integrated into human societies could be good for the plant, but only if the dependency is not exploited. These considerations reinforce responsibilities and positive duties to dependents. Donaldson and Kymlicka focus on how domestication affects freedom of movement and sharing of public space, duties of protection, use of products and labor, medical care, sex and reproduction, diet, and political representation (126-153). Even though plants lack the experiential capacities of animals, their well-being and flourishing is impacted by these concerns as well.

In the case of the domesticated individual houseplant, it is usually bred in captivity, in a greenhouse or nursery, making it much more delicate than its wild counterparts. This is why when you buy potted basil from a grocery store, and stick it outside it often sickens and dies quickly from the shock of being in a much harsher climate than that in which it was bred. In keeping with my argument for positive duties in the previous section, based on Palmer's relational account, if humans breed something that cannot survive on its own this causal relationship grounds positive duties to provide for it. With potted plants, I am the one who must provide food and water, make sure I place the plant in a place with adequate sun but not too much, and monitor the plant's growth in case it needs to be replanted in a bigger pot. To fulfill these positive duties, I am additionally required to educate myself on the needs and cycles of these plants as the

conditions of its well-being, for it to be healthy and strong and to grow, are almost wholly in my hands.

When discussing a purpose for house plants, we could say that they are purely for the enjoyment or use of humans, just like we might say pets are purely for the enjoyment and comfort of their owners. This is, at least in part, what motivates many people to have houseplants. They can get free, fresh herbs on a regular basis, or use them as a method of home décor. While this may appeal to many people, I do not think there is a convincing case that this is the only reason people have house plants. In the case of herbs, it often requires a good amount of work to have healthy and abundant plants. Since we can easily get fresh herbs from a grocery store or farmer's market, for relatively little cost, it is unlikely that the work of growing herbs at home is balanced by the products of one's labor. When it comes to either green plants or flowering ones used to "liven up" a space, plenty of people opt for art or even fake plants that require no care instead. There may be instrumental reasons for why people have houseplants, but with plenty of alternatives available that require far less work, there may be alternative values at play. One reason could be a feeling of admiration, properly stimulated by excellences in the plants, whether they be ones of beauty, smell, or taste. This would justify a prescription for affection or desire to integrate plants into one's life. The arguments for prescriptions of value in Part One not only give plausible reasons for these special interests, but establish why we ought to give plants moral consideration through respect for their well-being and

for the plants themselves. This concern with their well-being means that whatever purpose we have for domesticated plants must be balanced with their needs and interests.

Concerns with treatment and states of dependence of the domesticated illuminate a duty first to understand the plant's needs. One would not get a puppy or have a child without first doing some research on how to care for it, as that would be negligent and could have disastrous consequences. Remember that in discussing wild plants, prerogatives were cautiously allowed because the unknown variables in play make intervention risky in regards to wild plants. In the domestic case, variables are not only more controlled, but dependency itself requires us to give aid. One must first know what a dependent requires for their health, and what will be toxic to it if they are to fulfill their duties as caretaker at all. In the case of plants this usually means becoming familiar with the species, and knowing how much sun it needs, when to fertilize the soil, how often to water it, when to repot, how to measure soil PH, and knowing the history of the individual to determine if its species typical capacities for sun and weather can be withstood by this particular individual. When going on vacation one must arrange for someone to care for the plant(s) much like they would for a pet animal. This arrangement requires the regulation of the agent's own actions and life, for the sake of the plant itself, if it is to be a symbiotic one that demonstrates respect for the plant's well-being.

Some duties are generated by the process of domestication. As mentioned earlier the breeding of plants in greenhouses often makes them more vulnerable to sunburn, and

weather shock. This is why one of the duties listed is knowing the individual's history, rather than simply knowing what that type of plant needs in general. Domestication also usually involves selective breeding to exacerbate the qualities humans find appealing. For instance, herbs are bred so that their flavors are stronger, and have fragrances or tasting notes that are pleasing and none of the ones that are displeasing. This is to the benefit of humans, but it also means that insects are more attracted to the plants as well. Based on this selective breeding for our benefit, we also must be diligent about watching for signs of infestations and know how to treat them.

Avenues of exploitation are open in these cases in a number of ways. For example, there are those who fancy themselves green thumbs, and will continue to buy potted plants without learning how to properly care for them, and watch them die over and over again. This is an exploitative relationship where one's own self-image, ego, or esteem by others is being placated at the expense of the plant. Another iteration of this, again especially in the case of edible herbs, are those who really do only want the plant so that they can benefit off of its production. This is ultimately self-defeating of course, as over-plucked and ill-cared for plants will wither and either produce lackluster shoots, or possibly die altogether. These sorts of relationships are all too common, and I argue that they come from the moral agent's failure to recognize the duties that come from entering this sort of causal relationship, required by respectful consideration and care.

The discussion of herbs, naturally lends itself to questions of duties to edible plants in general, especially since the most obvious case of plant domestication is manifest in agriculture. We can extend many of the duties listed above to the farmer, though unlike the average person they are well aware of the needs of their plants. Growing is, after all, their livelihood. In this case, I will focus on not only the farmer's duties, and cases of potential exploitation, but on the consumers' relationships to crops. Though consumers are usually not in direct causal relation to these plants, we are part of an agricultural system, one that can lend itself to institutional injustice.

Our purpose in domesticating and farming crops has been most importantly to feed ourselves, which is explicitly for human subsistence and enjoyment, and sometimes profit. These reasons alone do not automatically make this relationship exploitative, and are justified by our concerns for human flourishing. Remember, only in some cases is a duty not to kill plants among the moral concerns we ought to have for them, and plants used for crops are precisely the ones that we choose to grow because their fruits are desirable for eating. So, I do not find plant farming in and of itself problematic in the way that I do find raising billions of animals to feed an unnecessary desire for meat problematic. However, if we look to something like the huge monocultures and tilling techniques that are responsible for the formation of dust bowls, we can identify some harms that are done to the plants themselves, as evidence of exploitative relationships.

Recall that the well-being of non-sentient life is constituted by basic functional capacities, serious interests, and the capacity for self-movement. Plants naturally exercise these capacities by pulling nutrients from the soil, by growing in communities with other plants that may act as deterrents to predators that would eat them before they can be pollinated and reproduce, and who may contribute a variety of nutrients to the soil when they die so as to keep it nutrient rich and continue the ability for individual plants, or their offspring, to sprout and grow. Without human intervention, plants are capable of sustaining themselves by fending off disease and some predators either with the help of their community, or because of their strong immune systems from growing in rich soil. Their reproductive capacities are exercised by their availability for pollination, and their return to the soil to re-enrich it so that their offspring can grow. Its needs and interests are met when it has enough nutrients, sunlight, space, and a community in which it can flourish.

Some farming methods work in harmony with these capacities and interests when farmers plant many different crops together, or alternate them, to maintain soil richness, use species like mustard as natural deterrents to bugs, and grow plants that can reproduce on their own in many cases, or whose seeds can be gathered to replant. This method of farming respects the plants capacities, interests, and integrity, while also benefiting humans. However, much more common, at least in the United States, are monocultures of genetically modified crops in which unsustainable practices result in poor soil that is pumped with fertilizers of specific macro nutrients to encourage the most growth for the

most profit. I will refrain from issuing a broad generalization that all GMO's are, and always will be, morally problematic, because I do not think that is necessarily the case. However, GMO crops that are unable to reproduce or be pollinated (usually so that farmers have to keep buying seeds from the company) demonstrate grievous *wrongs* to plants. If we look closely at this second scenario we will see that the basic needs of the plant may be met; it has to produce sellable products after all, but the purpose, process, treatment, and state of dependence of these plants is indicative of a disrespectful and exploitative relationship in which human desire and convenience are the only considerations taken into account.

The process is exploitative in the sense that it destroys the plants' reproductive and immune processes by growing it in deficient soil and creating species that do not have seeds. As a result of the poor soil which causes weak immune systems in the nutritionally deficient plants, additional measures are sometimes taken to splice pesticides into the plants themselves. Monocultures create a specific vulnerability, in that having so much of one species growing attracts droves of insects. This practice leads not only to a significant percentage of plants that are expected to be "wasted," but is also one reason for blights, to which our solution is the use of more pesticides. Of course, with the use of more pesticides, more pollinators are killed off. If the crops being grown are capable of sexual reproduction, this capacity is further degraded, and even if they are not, the loss of pollinators will affect any plants in the area, including wild ones or other crops.

This is a demonstration of human entitlement, which further entrenches a problem that we created in the first place by degrading functioning capacities of plants and then supplementing our own solution in order to benefit (some) humans with complete disregard for the plants themselves. If we look at the damage done to the plants' well-being, we can see that it violates most of the main categories that Donaldson and Kymlicka talk about through the irresponsible and exploitative control of diet, sexual ability, self-preservation, production, and labor of the plants. This example is the dominant form of agriculture in industrialized societies like the United States, and it is an exploitative one that fails to fulfill both positive and negative duties. By recognizing and acting on duties to plants, we could change these relationships into symbiotic ones.

To make these changes we would need to not only change current farming systems and regulations, but also consumption of produce. On the consumer's end, one would most likely have to adapt to the seasonal availability of produce, and regional abundance of certain foods or scarcity of others. Though this may seem improbable, many people already do this by shopping at farmer's markets, and though it is sometimes frustrating not to have access to a certain fruit or vegetable desired (and tempting just to run to the nearest grocery store), what starts off as a limitation could actually accentuate creativity, gratitude and culinary learning as long as a new system to provide for human needs is put in place. When it finally is the season for certain produce one is especially grateful to have it, and when it is not one might find themselves trying new foods or dishes that they never would have before. Consumers could also be expected to compost,

which would have to be matched by a duty of the municipality to pick up and process compost. This duty allows the dead matter of plants to return to the soil as nourishment, and enables the reciprocal system to continue.

An objection to these prescriptions could be that in our current context not only are these duties implausible given the current agricultural context, but they might negatively impact farmers or agricultural workers. My project is not one of political motivation, but is to establish the moral standard that when we fail in these duties and live our lives based on exploitative, destructive, and overly entitled practices, that the direct objects of these harms and of the moral wrongs are non-sentient living plants as well as sentient beings. A consistent value framework based on respect and promotion of well-being and attention to relationships must include these sorts of considerations. The current institutional frameworks that could make acting on these duties risky for farmers or agricultural workers, or at least limit their opportunities to provide for themselves, are additional moral and political issues. I think that an analysis of exploitative attitudes toward plants are part of an intersectional analysis of the vulnerabilities and disadvantaged sometimes faced by farm owners and agricultural workers, though I do not have the space to give that analysis here¹⁴. In remedying wrongs to plants we of course need to make sure we are not perpetuating other wrongs as well, but acknowledging the

¹⁴ More specifically, I take the ecofeminist position that the exploitation of nature is oppressive, just as the economic, political and racial or ethnic marginalization of many agricultural workers is oppressive, and that the feminist goal to end oppressive systems in all forms provides the intersectional framework to connect the exploitation of plants, workers, and some farm owners.

full range of wrongs perpetrated by our current systems can only aid in recognizing these problems. My aim is to show that in weighing these human interests we must try to mitigate negative impacts on plants for their own sake as much as possible, and live as sustainably as possible.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued for the position that non-sentient life, specifically plants, are patients of moral consideration, and that we have both positive and negative duties to them based on their capacities, well-being and relationships with moral agents. Rational reflection on the inherent qualities of plants justifies human concern for the well-being of non-sentient beings grounded in humility, gratitude, and awe which justify prescriptions of respect, affection/care, preservation and protection. Specific causal relationships between human moral agents and both domesticated and wild individuals generate presumptive duties not to harm, sometimes including duties not to kill, and positive duties for the provision and care of dependent plants, or as reparation for harms. We are called upon to ensure that our relationships with plants are symbiotic rather than exploitative. It is of concern to any moral agent to ensure that their actions and relationships are not exploitative and oppressive ones, and in order to do this we must consider moral duties and potential harms to non-sentient life for their own sake.

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