

Heroes or thieves? The ethical grounds for lingering concerns about new conservation

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Abstract After several years of intense debate surrounding so-called new conservation, there has been a general trend toward reconciliation among previously dissenting voices in the conservation community, a “more is more” mentality premised upon the belief that a greater diversity of conservation approaches will yield greater conservation benefits. However, there seems good reason to remain uneasy about the new conservation platform. We seek to clarify the reasons behind this lingering unease, which we suspect is shared by others in the conservation community, by re-examining new conservation through an ethical lens. The debates around new conservation have focused predominantly on the outcomes it promises to produce, reasoning by way of a consequentialist ethical framework. We introduce an alternative ethical framework, deontology, suggesting it provides novel insights that an exclusively consequentialist perspective fails to appreciate. A deontological ethic is concerned not with effects and outcomes, but with intentions, and whether those intentions align with moral principles and duties. From a deontological perspective, a strategy such as new conservation, which is exclusively focused on outcomes, appears highly suspect, especially when it endorses what is arguably an indefensible ethical orientation, anthropocentrism. We therefore suggest lingering concerns over new conservation are well-founded, and that, at least from a deontological perspective, the conservation community has a moral obligation to act on the express principle that non-human species possess intrinsic value, which should be protected.

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Introduction

Internal relations within the conservation community have been strained of late. Over the past few years, the so-called new conservationists, advocating conservation projects that emphasize benefits to humans and human communities (Kareiva and Marvier 2012), have clashed with so-called traditional conservationists, advocating the protection of biodiversity for its own sake (Soulé 2013). New conservationists believe conservation “for the people” will appeal to a much broader swath of society and still achieve conservation objectives, perhaps even more effectively than traditional conservation (Kareiva and Marvier 2007). They suggest that conservation pursued on principle, to uphold the intrinsic value of nature and non-human species, has failed (Lalasz et al. 2012), and that conservation marketed for the ostensible benefits it provides to humans, sometimes labeled “ecosystem services,” will receive support from more diverse groups of people, ultimately resulting in increasingly effective conservation projects (Daily et al. 2009; Kareiva and Marvier 2012; Marvier and Wong 2012; Marvier 2013; Kareiva 2014; Kirby 2014; Marris 2014; Marvier 2014; Marvier and Kareiva 2014a, 2014b).

More mollifying perspectives have recently come to the fore, suggesting that both the new and traditional camps have a rightful place and a necessary role in the conservation community (Hunter et al. 2014; Marris and Applet 2014; Petriello and Wallen 2015). Still, even as the community at large has moved toward an apparent reconciliation (Tallis and Lubchenco 2014), a vague sense of unease seems to linger, to the extent that Marvier (2014) asks, “why are people who

love the diversity of plants and animals and habitats so afraid of a diversity of approaches and motivations within the conservation community?” (p. 1). For those of us to whom this question is likely addressed (perhaps also, e.g., Doak et al. 2014; Soulé 2013; Cafaro and Primack 2014; Miller et al. 2014; Wuerthner et al. 2014), we might ask ourselves a similar question: why are we still so hesitant to simply put away differences, and “[celebrate] all motivations for conservation” (Marvier and Kareiva 2014a, p. 281)?

Taking Marvier’s (2014) question seriously, we offer a response by attempting to clarify the nature of our hesitation. We first discuss the differences between consequentialist and deontological ethics, and demonstrate how both can and should be brought to bear on moral judgments. We then discuss anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, using multiple moral frameworks to illustrate why the former is morally suspect. Linking these two ethical taxonomies, we explain why we should be apprehensive about any approach (e.g., new conservation) that implies outcomes are the sole criterion of morality, particularly when such an approach perpetuates an anthropocentric mindset. We conclude by suggesting that conservationists are charged to carry forward a non-anthropocentric moral banner, and new conservationists’ willingness to renounce this charge rightly creates unease in the conservation community.

Consequentialist and deontological ethics

Classifying perspectives in the new conservation debates, Hunter et al. (2014) invoke a taxonomy from environmental ethics, which distinguishes between biocentrism and anthropocentrism (discussed further below). They argue that new conservationists emphasize a more anthropocentric moral philosophy while traditional conservationists are more biocentric, but that the two positions can actually complement one another to achieve a broader spectrum of conservation agendas (Hunter et al. 2014). Although not entirely novel (e.g., Norton 1991), such an “ecumenical” perspective (Marvier 2014) has recently become popular, with leading proponents of new conservation, along with voices from the larger conservation community, agreeing to set aside differences and unite to tackle the challenges of conservation in as many ways as possible (Marvier 2013; Marris 2014; Tallis and Lubchenco 2014). However, simply embracing “a diversity of approaches” (Marris and Applet 2014, para. 15) may not be as easy as it seems. At the risk of sounding fractious, some of us are still not comfortable joining the union, as we struggle to reconcile new conservation with our full moral sensibilities. To explain this discomfort, we will introduce another taxonomy from the broader field of ethics, which distinguishes between consequentialism and deontology.

From a consequentialist perspective, the morality of an act is based on its outcomes (i.e., *what* happens), rather than any

characteristic of the act itself (i.e., *why* or *how* it happens). Everyday decisions are often heavily influenced by consequentialist concerns. For example, deciding whether to drive a car or peddle a bicycle to work, one might consider time, money, gas emissions, and personal enjoyment, each of which would be affected differently, depending on the mode of transportation selected. After weighing the relative costs and benefits, one would likely choose whichever option seems to produce the highest net benefit. Such a basic cost-benefit analysis is one particularly prevalent mode of consequentialist reasoning (Bennis et al. 2010).

While outcomes strongly influence our moral judgments, humans also consider other morally relevant factors, such as intentions or duties (Lombrozo 2009; Gore et al. 2011), when they engage in moral reasoning or decision-making. This type of consideration, in which an action is judged according to overarching moral principles about right and wrong, falls under the purview of deontological ethics. Perhaps the most prominent advocate of a deontological approach was Immanuel Kant (2002), who asserted, “[moral] worth depends not on the actuality of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of the volition, in accordance with which the action is done” (p. 15). Kant believed an act should be judged entirely by the will or intention behind it. Outcomes are morally irrelevant in themselves. According to Kant, a morally good act is performed purely and explicitly out of a sense of duty to uphold one principle, the categorical imperative. In many ways a secularized iteration of the golden rule, the categorical imperative states, “I ought never to conduct myself except so *that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law*” (Kant 2002, p. 18; emphasis in original). Kant argued that, as rational beings, humans have a fundamental duty to act as befits their rational nature. Since rationality demands consistency, Kant concluded we should act only in ways that, to be consistent, we could accept as universal norms (Kant 2002). The express intent to be rationally consistent is *categorically* (i.e., on principle, rather than *conditionally* on outcomes) *imperative* (i.e., necessary) of a good will, and a good act is one performed by a good will.

Though Kant’s theory of morality is too intricate for thorough discussion here, one specific offshoot of the categorical imperative is particularly salient to the current discussion. Kant (2002) argued that “the human being, and in general every rational being, *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as means* to the discretionary use of this or that will” (p. 45; emphasis in original). In other words, all humans have intrinsic value, an “absolute worth” endowed to them, according to Kant, by virtue of their rational nature. Following the same line of reasoning that leads to the categorical imperative, it is rationally inconsistent (and therefore, because it runs contrary to our duty as rational beings, fundamentally wrong) to treat people merely as instrumental means to a personal end—and it is wrong even if doing so has otherwise positive results

(Kant 2002). All outcomes aside, the willful and deliberate disrespect of another person's intrinsic value, or "dignity" (Kant 2002, p. 53), is inappropriate.

Our purpose in citing Kant is not only to (albeit briefly) outline a seminal deontological theory of morality, but also to show that ethics has a well-established tradition of judging morality on the basis of intention, duty, and principle. It also bears noting that deontology is deeply ingrained in the range of normal human experience. For example, many people may condemn the act of murder not only because of the harms it produces, but also because they believe, on principle, that it is wrong to infringe upon another person's right to live. This is an appeal to deontological ethics. Similarly, there is an intuitive difference between a corporation doing good works out of genuine altruism, and one doing such works to improve its public image, generate more business, and increase profits. We sense the two acts are not morally equivalent, though the outcomes may be the same; and yet, if we restricted ourselves to consider only the consequences of the two acts, without comparing their different motivations against established principles of good and bad or right and wrong, we would likely conclude that they *are* morally equivalent.

Although some scholars defend a *monistic* stance, which subscribes to just one overarching ethical framework (e.g., Callicott 1994), we embrace the *pluralistic* stance that multiple ethical frameworks are better suited to confront the moral complexities of lived experience (e.g., Wenz 1993). Much like different lenses used to view different wavelengths of light, different ethical frameworks pick up on different facets of morality. By utilizing just one ethical "lens," we are likely to filter out certain distinctions that, when viewed through multiple ethical "lenses," become highly morally significant. For example, a singularly consequentialist business manager might suggest using child slave laborers to produce some high-demand good, reasoning that they can more efficiently produce the desired good, and thereby generate a higher quota of overall happiness for more consumers, than, for example, a workforce comprised of well-paid middle class Americans. Most of us would find this suggestion repugnant and likely would not even entertain a discussion about any net benefits that might result from such a morally reprehensible practice. However, our purpose here is not to suggest that outcomes are morally irrelevant. Indeed, an exclusively deontological ethic can similarly suggest consequentially abhorrent measures; for example, if thousands of innocent people were to die because one person refused to lie to a corrupt government official, on the principle that lying is wrong.

As such, even when an action is fully justified from a consequentialist perspective, if it is not justifiable from a deontological perspective (or vice versa), it will likely seem not quite right. We suspect just such a dynamic between the two ethical frameworks underlies enduring concerns about new conservation. By operating within a restrictively consequentialist

ethical framework, new conservation has become detached from common moral reasoning and decision-making, to the extent that it may risk alienating those it seeks to attract. An increasing body of work demonstrates that, at least in certain scenarios, humans actually appeal to consequentialist, deontological, and even other ethical frameworks when they form moral judgments (Lombrozo 2009; Tanner 2009; Gore et al. 2011; Sacchi et al. 2014). Here we focus only on deontology and consequentialism because we believe ongoing tensions in the conservation community have resulted, at least in part, from the interplay between these two particular ethical frameworks (we will return to this discussion below). But it also stands to reason that the dynamic we highlight might reflect a more general pattern. That is, we hypothesize people who are sensitive to a plurality of moral considerations (e.g., not only outcomes, but also intentions, justice, care, and virtue) would be likely to distrust, and possibly even resist, any type of moral discourse being dominated by a single ethical framework. We propose this as an important direction for future research.

Is anthropocentrism a great moral wrong?

New conservation, and more broadly any conservation strategy prioritizing the provision of ecosystem services, evinces a decidedly anthropocentric ethical orientation (Raymond et al. 2013; Hunter et al. 2014). Anthropocentrists believe humans alone possess intrinsic value, and therefore humans alone are worthy of direct moral standing. Non-humans may be morally relevant, but only to the extent that they affect human interests (Goralnik and Nelson 2012). This perspective is predicated upon an influential conceptual tradition in Western culture, in which the world is dichotomized into two separate and distinct realms: "humans" and "nature" (Plumwood 1993). When a perceived difference in kind (i.e., between humans and nature) is interpreted to signify a difference in value (i.e., humans have intrinsic value and nature does not), such a conceptual separation can legitimate the subordination of the natural world to human use (Plumwood 1993). Non-anthropocentrists, by contrast, generally reject a dichotomized worldview separating humans from the rest of the natural world, denying the basic grounds upon which anthropocentrists assert the human species' higher value or inherent superiority.¹ Consequently, non-anthropocentrists believe at least some parts of the non-human world also, like

¹ Hunter et al. (2014) establish a somewhat false distinction between anthropocentrism and biocentrism. Because it attributes intrinsic value to all living things, including humans, biocentrism still fully encompasses the moral realm recognized by anthropocentrism (i.e., human beings). For this reason we are re-framing the distinction as "anthropocentric" and "non-anthropocentric," the latter referring to any ethical stance that de-centers (but does not exclude) humans from the moral universe by granting direct moral standing to at least some non-human entities.

humans, possess intrinsic value, and therefore also deserve moral consideration. Non-anthropocentrists can be distinguished along a gradient of moral inclusivity. For example, from a zoocentric perspective all animals possess direct moral standing, whereas from a biocentric perspective all living beings possess direct moral standing. While the differences between these various perspectives are significant, and certainly merit discussion on their own account, such a discussion is unfortunately beyond the scope of the current paper (see Goralnik and Nelson 2012). For our purposes it suffices to note that from any sort of non-anthropocentric perspective, humans are not the sole center of the moral universe, and it is inappropriate to limit concern only to human interests in moral decision-making.

This is *not* to say the moral standing of humans is diminished in a non-anthropocentric worldview; nor is it to suggest non-anthropocentrism condemns humanitarian efforts that benefit or assist people (Vucetich et al. 2015). To illustrate by analogy, imagine a hospital waiting room populated by three sorts of patients: those who need shots, those who need stitches, and those who need medicine. While it would certainly be appropriate for doctors to administer shots to those who need shots, or prescribe medicine to those who need medicine, doctors would arguably commit a moral trespass were they to arbitrarily treat only one class of patient while categorically denying the others deserve care, and even ignoring their presence in the room. In much the same way, from a non-anthropocentric perspective anthropocentrism can be said to appropriately recognize the moral standing of all humans, but inappropriately fail to do the same for non-humans.

While anthropocentrism and the dichotomized worldview underlying it were once accepted largely without question, and indeed animated natural resource management and conservation throughout much of the twentieth century (Callicott 1990), in more recent history compelling criticisms have been made against it. The dismantling of an anthropocentric viewpoint can be traced at least as far back as Darwin, whose theory of evolution brought human existence into sharp perspective by situating our species in an evolutionary context (Callicott 1989). While humans are certainly a unique life form (e.g., Gazzaniga 2008), the notion that this uniqueness is one of fundamental kind rather than degree is contestable, as is the belief that human uniqueness implies a moral distinction between the human species and all others (e.g., MacIntyre 1999). The postmodern turn in the latter half of the twentieth century in particular encouraged the examination of deeply embedded and broadly accepted assumptions, including beliefs about the nature of humans, reason, and consciousness (Rosenau 1991). This inclination to question virtually any sort of ideology also encouraged a healthy skepticism of “truths” previously assumed to be self-evident, such as the superiority of humans over nature (Mathews 1991; Plumwood 1993).

These developments in Western science and philosophy suggest anthropocentrism is an ethically indefensible position, an assertion that can be justified from within both of the two major schools of ethical thought we have already discussed, consequentialism and deontology, as well as a third that we will briefly introduce, virtue ethics:

1. *Consequentialism*

Since we purport to expand the new conservation discourse beyond consequentialism, we will make only a brief consequentialist critique of anthropocentrism. Arguably an anthropocentric mindset encouraged the insatiable exploitation of the earth’s natural resources throughout the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and now into the twenty-first, which degraded the environment in ways that now threaten the entire biosphere (White 1967; Plumwood 1993; Vitousek et al. 1997; Rockström et al. 2009; Vucetich et al. 2015). If, as could be persuasively argued, the sum of these harms resulting from anthropocentrism outweighs its sum benefits, then from a consequentialist perspective, anthropocentrism is morally reprehensible.

2. *Deontology*

In line with our aim to push the new conservation discourse past purely consequentialist perspectives, and echoing an increasing body of scholarship on deontology in both theoretical (e.g., O’Neill 1997) and applied (e.g., Hale et al. 2014) environmental ethics, we will explain at somewhat greater length how anthropocentrism is inappropriate from a deontological perspective, using a modernized version of the theory advanced by Kant. Because Kant (2002) identified rationality (at the time believed to be a uniquely human trait) as the locus of intrinsic value, he accordingly attributed intrinsic value only to human beings (Kant 1997). However, as mentioned above, the state of understanding has changed considerably since Kant’s time in the eighteenth century, and the differences between the human species and other species (including the human capacity for reasoning) no longer provide compelling grounds upon which to maintain the inherent superiority of humans over non-humans (Taylor 1981; Plumwood 1993; Vucetich et al. 2015).

Intrinsic value is a complicated and in some ways contested idea (Vucetich et al. 2015) that has been defended by a diverse spectrum of arguments (e.g., Taylor 1981; Rolston 1991; Varner 1998). But to maintain an anthropocentric stance as Kant did, by specifying some particular quality as the seat of intrinsic value, two conditions must obtain: (1) we must be able to establish that the quality in question can reasonably be used to discriminate between entities with and without intrinsic value; and (2) we must be able to demonstrate that humans alone possess this quality. Historically, either sentience or (in Kant’s

case) reason has been identified as the quality signifying intrinsic value. However, based on our modern scientific understanding of the sentience and intellect of many non-human animals, it is difficult if not impossible to maintain the soundness of the claim that these qualities are unique to human beings (e.g., Emery and Clayton 2004; Dawkins 2006). Thus, on fairly basic empirical grounds, Kant's anthropocentrism can be discredited. Even further, though, in at least certain prominent schools of Western thought, rationality is no longer accepted as the gold standard of intrinsic value it was once believed to be; a belief that, it is argued, was historically conditioned, value-laden, and anthropocentrically biased (e.g., Mathews 1991; Plumwood 1993). Therefore, since a significant body of evidence and scholarship suggests that neither of the two conditions defined above obtains, we suggest human rationality is no longer a clearly defensible basis for an anthropocentric stance attributing intrinsic value to humans alone.

In anticipation of a likely criticism, we will take a moment to dismiss the allegation that this revised perspective on rationality, as a quality of no particular moral significance, abrogates the duty for humans to demonstrate rational consistency, as suggested by Kant's categorical imperative. Although rationality is not the sole source of intrinsic value in the moral universe, it is still quintessentially human, a critical channel by which we interface with and experience the world (McCord 2012). From this premise, it could be argued, honoring, upholding, and exercising our rational nature is a duty of human existence, as a manifestation of human integrity (McCord 2012) and a mark of human flourishing (MacIntyre 1999). Rationality is not, however, a mark of moral superiority. Reason is a compass, not a crown: it helps us navigate our uniquely human mode of existence, but it does not in itself imbue us with unique moral worth among all species.

Returning to the main argument, we suggest that in the absence of compelling evidence indicating otherwise, we ought to assume the intrinsic value of (at least some) non-human entities (Birch 1993). Subsequently, following the logic of Kant's categorical imperative, we conclude that non-human beings possessing intrinsic value ought also to be valued and treated as ends in themselves. Anthropocentrism not only treats, but even more basically regards, non-humans as resources, to be used as we see fit in pursuing our human ends. By so treating non-humans as mere means, we neglect our duty to rational consistency and fail to honor the non-anthropocentric moral obligations to which it points. Therefore, from a deontological perspective derived from Kant's classic theory, anthropocentrism is morally reprehensible.

3. *Virtue ethics*

A third major ethical framework we have not yet discussed is virtue ethics (e.g., Sandler and Cafaro 2005), which defines morality largely as a matter of character. A moral person exemplifies certain virtues, such as wisdom, generosity, and temperance; and a moral act is one performed by a virtuous person (Hursthouse 2013). Virtue ethics, like deontology, has an important place in conservation, especially given the uncertainty and indeed uncontrollability of outcomes in the complex world we inhabit (Heller and Hobbs 2014). Conservationists often face difficult situations requiring tradeoffs, in which the various effects of different decisions might seem good and bad for different reasons but in equal measure (Hirsch et al. 2010). In such cases, where any sort of cost-benefit analysis has only limited usefulness, commitment to a set of virtues may be essential to help us navigate our way through difficult decisions (Heller and Hobbs 2014).

Anthropocentrism assumes one species (our own) stands superior to all others and arguably encourages both disrespect and indifference toward the non-human world, the degradation of which becomes troubling only insofar as it compromises human welfare (White 1967; Plumwood 1993). If this characterization is correct, anthropocentrism demonstrates both extreme hubris and profound callousness, neither of which is generally considered a wise or virtuous quality (see also McShane 2007). Thus, from a virtue perspective, anthropocentrism is morally reprehensible.

In short, as supported by at least three arguments from the three major branches of ethical theory, we suggest anthropocentrism is a great moral wrong.² Certainly, being a species (and a very social species at that), it is not surprising that, as commonly observed in ingroup/outgroup dynamics (Cohen et al. 2006), different moral codes should govern our inter-human relations and our relations with non-humans. It seems only "natural," so to speak, that we are inclined to look out for fellow humans, as members of a single species in a global community of diverse life forms (Wilson 1999), in much the same way that many of us would put the welfare of our family over the welfare of strangers. Such differential treatment, however, does not (and should not) necessarily entail differential attribution of moral standing and intrinsic value. For example, a father may decide to send his own child to college instead of sending money to aid workers fighting epidemics in impoverished African villages, or even paying for a neighbor's cancer treatment. Given limited resources he has to set a priority, but his prioritization does nothing to diminish his

² Though space precludes more extensive explanation, anthropocentrism could also be contested from additional ethical frameworks, such as care ethics (e.g., Warren 1999), a Leopoldian land ethic (e.g., Callicott 1989), or indigenous ethics (e.g., Kimmerer 2013).

fundamental commitment to acknowledge the inherent worth of all human beings. He does not refrain from helping the villagers or his neighbor because he denies they have direct moral standing. Probably, given adequate resources, many of us would choose to send our own children to college, pay our neighbors' medical expenses, *and* help impoverished Third World villagers. The challenging reality, however, is that we generally lack the wherewithal to make manifest the full extent of our moral commitments, even only within the human realm.

Responsibilities are far more numerous in a populous moral universe than they are in a moral universe populated by only a small number of entities attributed with direct moral standing. Identifying gradients of intimacy in our relationships (e.g., offspring as opposed to neighbor, or neighbor as opposed to international citizen), some of which are biologically based (Hastings et al. 2005), helps us practically navigate a complex moral domain; but inevitably at times we have to make difficult tradeoffs, prioritizations, and sacrifices. This can admittedly be an uncomfortable burden to bear. However, it would be an act of willful and malicious ignorance to narrow one's moral universe simply to ease the burden of inhabiting it. Moral standing should be granted based upon beliefs about who or what is worthy of moral standing, not denied for the sake of ease or convenience. While it may indeed increase the onus upon us to acknowledge a much broader moral universe, the challenge does not mitigate the necessity of the task. Just as it would be wrong to categorically exclude women, African Americans, or Muslims from direct moral standing so that they could be ignored or mistreated in good conscience, it is wrong to categorically exclude American pika, quaking aspen, or gray wolves without justification.

Deontological insights

Throughout the new conservation debates, some traditional conservationists have occasionally invoked ethical principles emphasizing the intrinsic value of non-humans: "The worth of nature is beyond question and our obligation to minimize its gratuitous degradation is no less" (Soulé 2013, p. 896; see also Cafaro and Primack (2014), Miller et al. (2014), and Wuerthner et al. (2014)). However, such assertions are more of an exception than a rule, and by and large the arguments advanced by both "new" and "traditional" conservationists have been made in predominantly consequentialist terms. Importantly, a deontological lens has not, to our knowledge, been used specifically to examine or critique the principles (or, more accurately, the lack thereof) underlying new conservation. We now turn our attention to this task, as we believe doing so will clarify why some members of the conservation community continue to be uncomfortable with the new conservation platform.

Consider the following scenario. A thief breaks into the house of an affluent banker and steals a large sum of money. He hides the money in a nondescript location, planning to collect it at a later time, but before he is able to retrieve it, a homeless woman stumbles upon the cash. She takes the money to the police and they return it to the banker, whose fortune is so vast that the loss of even a large amount of money is insignificant to him. Grateful for the woman's honesty, he allows her to keep the entire sum, which she uses to change her life for the better. How shall we judge the theft? In this case, different moral frameworks seem to point to conflicting interpretations. A consequentialist might find the whole situation immensely satisfactory, considering the altogether happy outcomes: the homeless woman benefits; the generous banker suffers no harm; and the dishonest thief gets nothing. A deontologist, by contrast, might condemn the theft as an immoral act, wrongfully committed with malicious intent.

Now juxtapose this story with another: the legend of Robin Hood, who steals from the rich to give to the poor. Once again, the outcomes of the tale are generally quite happy, since a great number of poor people benefit, while a comparatively smaller number of wealthy people are adversely affected (and arguably to a lesser degree than the degree to which the poor benefit). However, the motivation for theft in this story is considerably different than in the last. Robin Hood is a hero, manifesting the ideals of equity and justice. He acts not only to reduce suffering and oppression, but also with the intent to protect and uphold the inherent dignity of the poor. In this case, both a consequentialist and a deontologist might rest satisfied that all is well in the moral universe.

New conservationists and traditional conservationists all act to achieve similar ends, which we might generally call "the conservation of nature." However, much like the act of theft in our two stories above, the new and traditional camps advance very different reasons for conservation (discussed below). While a strictly consequentialist perspective is oblivious to the moral repercussions of these distinctions, from a deontological perspective they represent legitimate cause for concern. Simply put, conservationists might be heroes or they might be thieves, but only a deontological ethic can tell the difference.

A lurking unease on two fronts

New conservation endorses an anthropocentric ethic by suggesting conservationists should "describ[e] and demonstrat[e] the benefits of nature for people and their children," ostensibly "a more effective approach" than a message of intrinsic value, which "inspir[es]...relatively narrow segments of the population" (Marvier 2013, p. 3). It may be true that "appeals to human benefits (with no mention of nature's intrinsic value) can deliver impressive conservation results" (Marvier and Kareiva 2014b, p. 131), or it may not be true (Doak et al.

2014; Vucetich et al. 2015). We remain skeptical of this basic empirical claim, and can quite easily imagine that initiatives motivated by a non-anthropocentric ethic might turn out not only to protect non-human nature, but also promote human welfare, more effectively than initiatives that are anthropocentrically motivated. This is a hypothesis that remains to be tested. However, we also point out that no number of beneficial outcomes can *fully* justify an act if it is pursued on the basis of immoral principles. New conservation is anthropocentric, and, as we have suggested, there is good reason to believe anthropocentrism is morally wrong. Therefore, in at least one important sense, when viewed through a deontological lens, new conservation is also morally wrong. Perhaps this is why some of us still have trouble accepting new conservation, even as just one of many conservation approaches. Although it may raise money, help people, and save species, at some level of morality it is still *not quite right* for committed non-anthropocentrists who do not filter the moral universe through an exclusively consequentialist lens.

This brings us to the next point, a second and perhaps more alarming front of unease that hovers over new conservation, and indeed the most recent turn taken by the entire new conservation debate. While it certainly has anthropocentric leanings (Hunter et al. 2014), new conservationists endorse an anthropocentric approach not because they maintain (or explicitly state) that only humans have direct moral standing. Rather, they endorse an anthropocentric approach because they believe most people are anthropocentric, and so will be more motivated to support conservation if it is in their benefit to do so (Marvier and Wong 2012; Marvier 2014). In other words, new conservation is actually based on a sort of pragmatic or opportunistic anthropocentrism, a form of consequentialism that demonstrates only the fundamental commitment to do what works: “We stand by our hypotheses that conservation will do better by embracing benefits to people...Let outcomes on the ground be the arbiter of this debate” (Marvier and Kareiva 2014b, p. 132; see also Miller et al. 2011; Robinson 2011). By and large endorsing this strictly “practical” approach (Marvier 2014, p. 2), the discourse around new conservation has become disconcertingly restricted, with new conservationists effectively silencing any “silly arguments” (Toomey 2014, para. 19) based in moral principle as “misplaced and potentially repugnant to the broader public,” (Marvier and Kareiva 2014a, p. 281), and insisting that we “move from philosophical debates to rigorous assessments of the effectiveness of actions” (Tallis and Lubchenco 2014, p. 28). And yet, while we may find it difficult to argue against the apparently reasonable position of new conservationists as self-proclaimed pragmatists or realists, we also find that their appeals to outcomes alone do nothing to quell the concerns that continue to surface when we think past the *what* to the *how* and *why* of conservation.

Traditional conservationists, while largely concerned with achieving desired conservation outcomes, are also committed to pursue conservation out of the *categorical imperative* to respect and uphold the intrinsic value and dignity of non-human species (Noss et al. 2012; Soulé 2013; Miller et al. 2014). According to Kant’s theory (as we have interpreted it for a twenty-first century context), this is the very definition of a moral act. New conservation, by contrast, not only counsels that we should act contrary to moral principle by endorsing anthropocentrism, a blatant violation of the categorical imperative, but also that we should renounce principle altogether, and simply do whatever it takes to successfully achieve desired outcomes. Dismissing moral conviction as “catechism” (Marvier 2014, p. 2), “conservation orthodoxy” (Marvier and Kareiva 2014a, p. 281), and “an article of faith,” (Marvier 2014, p. 1), new conservation seems to celebrate its lack of overarching moral commitments, signifying an inability (or unwillingness) to discern right from wrong in any but the bluntest of consequentialist terms. Being the at least partially deontological creatures that we are, it is no wonder such a mercenary ethical approach strikes us as somewhat specious, and particularly when it assumes a decidedly anthropocentric form.

At this point we feel the need to firmly debunk allegations that we oppose measures to improve the welfare of human beings. Our position is not “rooted in misanthropy and distrust of humans” (Marvier 2014, p. 1), and we feel confident in asserting that neither are the positions of most, and probably all, conservationists, including those representing the more stringently “traditional” forms of conservation (e.g., Noss et al. 2012; Soulé 2013). Non-anthropocentrism is not misanthropy (see Vucetich et al. 2015 for clarification of this common misconception). It is not wrong to care about and protect the wellbeing of humans, and we do not attribute evil intentions to humanitarians. The effort to improve human welfare is an honorable goal, and no less worthy than efforts to protect any other species. However, we also reject the view that conservation efforts should be motivated by “messages that emphasize the value of protecting nature in terms of benefits to people rather than for its intrinsic value” (Marvier and Wong 2012, p. 294), a message that not only condones but also perpetuates, and indeed embodies, an anthropocentric mindset. We echo Cafaro and Primack (2014) in asserting that the core mission of conservation is to protect nature for its own intrinsic value, and we suggest conservationists should speak with one voice to firmly reject anthropocentrism, and all traces of it.

From a deontological perspective, those who realize anthropocentrism is morally wrong have a duty to publically reject it, even (and in fact particularly) if it does prevail in society at large. If ongoing struggles to extend even basic human rights across the globe are any indication, it seems this may be long, arduous work. However, the difficulty of the task

should not detract from the tenacity with which it is confronted. Conservationists should be heroes, motivated by the clear intention to respect and protect the inherent dignity of the non-human world, against all obstacles. We can talk about the benefit of nature to humans. This is no myth and no lie, and there is no harm in pointing it out. But we should also resist any inclination to promote such an anthropocentric perspective as a primary marketing strategy, so to speak, or accept it as an ultimate goal. Invoking a deontological perspective, we maintain that it is wrong to perceive, talk about, treat - and yes, even save - the natural world as mere instrumental means to our human ends. Perhaps (and we emphasize *perhaps*) new conservation is more effective, efficient, and broadly appealing than traditional conservation, and perhaps it is not; either way, it carries the moral blight of anthropocentrism.

Concluding thoughts

In this essay we have used a deontological ethical framework to shed light on the debates surrounding new conservation. Either a strictly consequentialist moral framework or an anthropocentric orientation would merit ethical suspicion on its own, but the new conservation debates actually create cause for concern on both fronts. Even if the outcomes of new conservation are, as attested, as good as if not better than traditional conservation strategies, we cannot simply accept consequentialist blinders and ignore the pangs of conscience stirred by new conservation and its (provisionally) anthropocentric agenda.

Conservationists should remain committed to acknowledging and explicitly protecting the intrinsic value of non-human nature, a commitment that ought to be prominently and proudly advanced, rather than hidden away, marginalized, or suppressed. As some members of the conservation community take steps toward unity and reconciliation, we suspect others, like ourselves, remain uneasy about building an alliance with the new conservation camp. We have tried to crystallize one of the main sources of that discomfort, and we hope our reflections will encourage ongoing dialog and productive debate. If our position continues to generate tensions in the conservation community, at least we know those tensions exist with good reason.

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