The Self and the Ecological: Towards an Integration of Selfhood and Environmental Responsibility.

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Abstract

It is not a new question as to whether there might be an ecological ethic. This study examines contemporary efforts to engage this question philosophically. These are found to assume some conception of environmental value, however the way in which it is conceived is seen to have significant implications for the role of philosophy in the question of how we might understand environmental responsibility. If this is to be understood in a substantial sense, thus as more than mere prudent self interest and therefore prompting genuine philosophical questions, then substantial questions about the nature of values and the process of valuing must be addressed. The study shows that addressing these questions requires that we address fundamental questions about the nature of the self, and the way in which the self is constituted by the process of engaging its fundamental goods and values. However, environmental responsibility is found to be something which cannot be understood in terms of a self which engages an environmental good. This is the contemporary notion of the ‘ecological self,’ and it is found to be untenable. It is shown that environmental responsibility, if it is to be tenable in a substantial sense, must be intrinsically part of being a self, such that the task of being environmentally responsible is integrally part of the task of being a self. Kierkegaard provides an account of selfhood as a task, and his account of the self is explored. Courting paradox, Kierkegaard challenges us to understand the self as essentially a matter of both immanence and transcendence. Understanding the self in this way is the means to accommodate the possibility that environmental responsibility is an integral part of selfhood, thus an immanent potential to be realised by the individual rather than something which must be grounded philosophically.
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Introduction.

It is not a new question as to whether there might be an ecological ethic. Writing in 1867, Victor Hugo put forward the possibility that there could be such an ethic:

‘In the relations of man with the animals, with the flowers, with the objects of creation, there is a great ethic, scarcely perceived as yet, which will at length break forth into the light and which will be the corollary and complement to human ethics.’

The possibility of such an ethic remains in question, and it is this question and its implications which this study aims to engage.

It is with Aldo Leopold’s 1949 essay The Land Ethic that the argument in support of an ecological ethic is generally recognised as having been instigated. Leopold perceived the need to counterbalance a general tendency to assume an exploitative stance towards the land.

‘There is as yet no ethic dealing with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. …The land relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.’

Leopold’s essay breaks new ground by suggesting that we might have obligations towards natural and non-human entities. Should such obligations obtain, an ecological ethic would be the framework within which their nature and justification might be understood.

For both Hugo and Leopold, an ecological ethic is a possibility yet to be realised. Neither was working within a philosophical framework, and neither elaborated in any substantial way upon the question they raised; nevertheless, both can be seen to have anticipated substantial philosophical questions. Should an ecological ethic be the ‘corollary and complement to human ethics’ as Hugo suggests, then it would represent an expansion of, or extension to established ethical systems. Should an ecological ethic entail obligations as Leopold suggests, then these would have to be integrally part of this expansion or extension, such that they are related in some non-

arbitrary way to those obligations that obtain between moral agents. Should an ecological ethic be something which is real to the extent that it is non-arbitrary, but as yet ‘scarcely perceived’, then the implication must be that an ethic is something which we might articulate or derive or otherwise come to recognise. To raise the question of the possibility of an ecological ethic is to raise substantial questions about ethics in general; included therein are questions concerning ‘human ethics.’ The legacy of Hugo and Leopold is to have articulated the initial question.

Philosophers have in recent decades set themselves to the task of addressing the substantial questions anticipated by Leopold and Hugo. Their collective efforts in so doing have defined the field of environmental ethics, which can be recognised as having emerged only in recent decades as an acknowledged field of philosophical inquiry. This we might understand as co-emergent with the broader field of ‘ecophilosophy’, which latter is broader in its scope to the extent that it is not exclusively concerned with the question of an ecological ethic. Environmental ethics can be understood as one strand of ecophilosophy, with Leopold foremost among the writers who have inspired this strand.

Being centrally concerned with the derivation of an ecological ethic, environmental ethics proceeds from the assumption that there should be such an ethic, and that we have an active role to play in bringing it to light. More specifically, the assumption is that we as philosophers have an active role in bringing this to light. This, however, is in fact a twofold assumption: that an ethic is something we might derive or bring to light, and that the job of so doing is the job of the philosopher. Both facets of this twofold assumption will prove to be far from innocent; in the course of this study, both will be called into question.

In Chapter One I explore the question of whether an ecological ethic can coherently be conceived. I examine the efforts of environmental ethicists to answer the question of whether there can be an ecological ethic, which they have sought to do by demonstrating its successful derivation. This demonstration, however, proves to be unconvincing, and by reconstructing the overall approach taken by environmental ethicists, I show that an ecological ethic proves to be elusive. Moreover, I show that the purposeful attempt to derive an ecological ethic is misguided.
Some conception of value is the point upon which the various efforts to demonstrate the derivation of an ecological ethic have converged. There has been general consensus that this must be some conception of non-instrumental value, and to this end the debate has been dominated by the question of the intrinsic value of the non-human or natural entity (this I define as the ‘ecological entity’). However, this is an approach which is soon seen to be fraught with circularity. It is clear that if any such conception of value can be understood to be doing any work at all, then it must be conceivable in some non-arbitrary way. It is on this point, however, that the contemporary efforts to establish an ecological ethic are seen to founder; their reliance on the notion of intrinsic value results in their being defeated on the charge of circularity or arbitrariness. To recognise these problems is to recognise the need to raise prior, more fundamental questions as to the nature of values and the process of valuing. Ultimately, the failure of contemporary efforts to derive an ecological ethic is shown to be their failure to raise these questions.

Dismissing the explicit effort to derive an ecological ethic, my argument in Chapter One proceeds to show that the correct line of inquiry is to raise more fundamental questions about the nature of ethics and what it means to be ethical. Rather than raising questions within a normative ethical framework, my approach hereafter tends towards the meta-ethical. To take such an approach is to raise questions much broader than those specifically concerned with the nature or possibility of an ecological ethic. Thus, the question of establishing whether an obligation obtains in our relationship with the ecological entity is eschewed. Indeed, the much more general question of grounding the normative ought is also eschewed. The more fruitful line of inquiry I advocate is one which proceeds on the basis of raising much more fundamental questions about the sources of normativity. Ultimately, these are questions of what it is to be ethical. Anscombe and Prichard provide the impetus for this stage of the investigation; I concur with them that providing a theoretical grounding for the normative ought is a spurious undertaking.

To repudiate the question of grounding the normative ought is to dismiss the question of whether we should behave ethically towards the ecological entity, and of any explanation as to why we should do so. The alternative approach which I advocate in
Chapter One, is to begin with the empirical observation that we do in fact value the entity. This we do in many and various ways, and potentially among these evaluations is moral evaluation. To make such an evaluation is something which we can regard as an ordinary moral judgement, thus something which is routinely part of our experience as moral agents. To the extent that it is an empirical fact of our experience, this is regarded as standing in no need of justification or theoretical grounding. Williams has been the main inspiration for this stage of the argument, and his notion of ‘thick’ ethical terms is adopted. These are the moral concepts we routinely deploy, in which our ordinary moral judgements are encapsulated. I argue that an understanding of our valuing the ecological entity must begin with the evaluations which are always already integrally part of our experience.

Chapter Two takes up the point that ethics begins with our ethical experience, elaborating upon the observation that we do in fact value the ecological entity in many and various ways. This apparently simple observation proves, however, to be far from trite; while it is an observation that requires no explanation or justification, it turns out to be one that invites substantial explication. It is a question of how we value the ecological entity; the ‘assertion-that’ we value it and any ‘explanation-why’ we do so are eschewed in favour of an ‘explication-how’ we value it in fact. To the extent that it avoids any attempt to ground these observations in explanation, the approach can be understood as phenomenological. Proceeding from a minimal definition of the phenomenological method, the approach taken in this chapter is one of clarificatory explication.

Avoiding any reductive account of values, the emphasis of my investigation shifts to an explication of the process of our investing things with value. To this end it is centred on the notion of significance, which I take to be a protean notion through which we might focus an exploration of the practices and institutions of valuing. To value something is to invest it with some significance; to value the ecological entity is to invest it with significance and this we do in many and various ways. While things are significant in the simplest sense when they are the means to some end, they might be significant in the much more interesting sense in which they are of some moral significance. It is this possibility that I seek to explore, and to this end the
significance of the ecological entity becomes the key notion upon which the investigation is focussed hereafter.

Our question hereafter is how, or indeed whether, any moral evaluation might arise within our everyday practices of valuing as we interact with the ecological entity. A reductive account of these practices, however, is soon found to be spurious in just the same way as is a reductive account of values. This stage of my argument endorses MacIntyre’s account of practices: following MacIntyre, we see that practices must be understood in terms of self-reflective participation therein. The crucial point is that the notion of the self is pivotal in understanding practices, and through these the process of valuing; the notion of the self proves to be the crucial notion which is the focus of this and later chapters. Among the many and various things which are significant for the self and the many and various ways in which they may be significant, self-reflective participation in practices is the means to understand the self as immanently engaged with these things.

A number of substantial themes are brought together by MacIntyre’s account of practices, and by exploring these, my argument in Chapter Two aims to draw out the centrality of the notion of the self in understanding the process of valuing. In particular, MacIntyre’s notions of narrative unity, embedding in meaningful context, tradition, and the embodiment of conflict are explored. It is through these notions that we can begin to understand the self as actively and self-reflectively engaged with its goods and values. We begin to see that this engagement must be understood in a substantial sense, indeed in a sense much more substantial than that in which it would be something the self might freely choose. The self-reflective engagement which MacIntyre describes is one in which the self finds itself immersed in its goods and values; its engagement, therefore, is to some extent an immanent engagement.

Understanding the self as immanently engaged with its goods and values is the means to understand it in a very substantial way, and ultimately in such a way that its being moral derives from its understanding of itself. However, we will see that in order to understand it as such, we must move beyond MacIntyre’s account of the self: while his account usefully presents the self as something we can understand in terms of its active and reflective engagement with its goods and values, it falls short of fully
accounting for this as an immanent engagement. This point is more fully addressed by Taylor’s account of the self, which latter I endorse as offering considerable advantage over MacIntyre’s. While for Taylor the self must still be understood as actively and reflectively engaged with its goods and values, his account takes this a step further, whereby it is also an immanent engagement which is constitutive of selfhood. For Taylor, self and good intertwine. This is a central thread of Taylor’s account, and a theme which I explore in this and subsequent chapters.

Understanding the self as immanently engaged or intertwined with its good and values becomes the guiding thread for the remainder of the study. In particular, I focus on the question of whether the goods and values with which the self is immanently engaged might include the significance of the ecological entity. Such an immanent engagement might be the basis for there being a moral dimension to the self’s interrelationship with the ecological entity. Should this possibility obtain, then it is clear that we must account for its being so in some way which does not simply reiterate the problematic notion of intrinsic value. To this end, our emphasis must be on understanding the self, and whether an engagement with the significance of the ecological entity is integrally and irreducibly part of its being the self that it is. My aim in this stage of the study is to address this question by elaborating Taylor’s account of the self, and in particular to see how it might be the means to more fully understand the self in its encounter with the ecological entity.

Chapter Three elaborates upon Taylor’s thesis that the self should be understood in terms of its intertwining with the good. For Taylor, this intertwining can be understood as a constitutive relation between self and good, whereby it is self-description or self-understanding which enables our appreciation of the good. It is in this formulation of the self as immanently engaged with its goods and values that the real strength of Taylor’s account, and its advantage over MacIntyre’s, comes to the fore. Among the goods and values with which the self is immanently engaged are those that form the basis for its being the moral agent that it is; by understanding the self in terms of that which enables its appreciation of these goods and values, we can raise the question of that which enables it to be moral. By so doing, we can explore the ways in which its being moral in its dealings with the ecological entity might be enabled, or indeed the ways in which this might be challenged.
While for Taylor it is self-description or self-understanding that enables our appreciation of the good, this constitutive relation cannot be understood as being self-consciously directed; self-description or self-understanding is never something which we self-consciously set out to attain. Rather than a matter of deliberation or self-determination, self-understanding must be understood as that which enables a corresponding appreciation of the good. But nor can self-understanding be understood in a sense that is passive or static: self-understanding and its corresponding appreciation of goods and values is surely not something which is predetermined. The active and reflective engagement of the self with its goods and values which Taylor intends is something we need to understand not as something the self might simply choose to do, but as something that it is, indeed, as something inherently part of its being the self that it is. Thus, Taylor emphasises that it is a constitutive relation, not a causal relation.

The need to understand the self as constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values is the point which instigates a move beyond Taylor’s account, a move which Chapter Three begins to explore. We begin to see that such a self will confront the issue of its own self-understanding in those instances in which its grasp of the good is only partial or tenuous. We see that such a self is one whose selfhood is an issue, and is an issue which it must recognise and to which it must respond in some way. The key point which we begin to see in this chapter is that selfhood per se is a task. My aim in this chapter is to raise the possibility that there is a task of selfhood, and to postulate that there may be a historical dimension to this task. To fully account for this task, and to establish just how it could or should be understood, is a matter to which I attend in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Four aims to explore the possibility that the self might be understood as tasked with being a self in such a way that a reappraisal of its relationship with the ecological entity might be integrally part of this task. To this end it examines the concept of the ‘ecological self.’ This can be interpreted as the basis for a second strand of the contemporary ecophilosophical debate. This second strand can be defined in terms of its reliance upon an idealised conception of the self, being one which would be naturally inclined towards a less exploitative or otherwise more
wholesome relationship with the ecological entity. While the first strand of the contemporary debate (examined in Chapter One) seeks to understand the ecological entity as the basis for our being ethical towards it, the second strand seeks to find this basis in an idealised conception of the self. Either implicitly or explicitly, the various approaches which can be interpreted as belonging to the second strand presuppose that some version of the ecological self is tenable.

Various contemporary approaches which might be understood as beholden to some version of the ecological self are considered in Chapter Four. Among them are deep ecology, transpersonal ecology, ecofeminism, and environmental virtue ethics. I examine each of these, along with some related conceptions of the ecological self; however, I endorse none as a viable conception of the self as it relates to the ecological entity. Indeed, the ecological self is a conception which I find to be inherently untenable: its failure, and the failure of those approaches beholden to it, is that the self is idealised in such a way as to guarantee the desired outcome of a more wholesome relationship with the ecological entity. To assert that the self is naturally inclined towards some idealised end can only be to beg the question.

Of the contemporary approaches that constitute the ‘ecological self’ strand of ecophilosophy, it is environmental virtue ethics that most fully accounts for the self in terms of its being tasked with being a self. Nevertheless, this too is found to be an approach that fails to fulfil its promise. I examine several contemporary efforts to derive an environmental virtue ethic. These I find to be unsatisfactory: all resort to claiming that some particular virtue is the environmental virtue, and therefore that it is a virtue which we as individuals should cultivate. To do so is to beg the question: the virtue is nominated in order to guarantee that the self can be understood as naturally inclined towards being ethical with respect to the ecological entity. It cannot be a tenable approach to virtue ethics to seek to establish some particular virtue as the basis for the self’s being virtuous and therefore ethical. Any account of virtue ethics must in the first instance be an account of the virtuous self, understood in terms of its being constituted as such. Whether or not its being so constituted can accommodate its being virtuous in its dealings with the ecological entity is the point in question.
McDowell offers a much more substantial account of the virtuous self and this I explore in some detail. McDowell seeks to account for the virtuous self ‘from the inside out’, and it is through a consideration of his account that the crucial notion of the motivational self-concept is introduced. This we can understand as that which enables the practice and cultivation of virtue, whereby the virtuous self is able to see the situation in which it is compelled to act in terms of the virtues by which it understands itself. However, I find that we cannot conceive of the *environmentally* virtuous self without building in some good which is external to the self, such as intrinsic value. This proves to be a problematic move: it is far from clear how such a good might be integrated as part of self-understanding. To require that the self must understand itself in terms of a good which is external to it is irreconcilable with an account of virtue which requires that the aretaic notions of human excellence are fundamental, and therefore non-derivable from any external criteria. The environmentally virtuous self proves to be a notion which is flawed.

To the extent that it is beholden to the ascription of a good which is external to the self, the ecological self is a notion which I discount as untenable. Its failure is that it requires the self to choose in terms of a good which cannot be among those in terms of which it understands itself. This must be a violation of the key notion of the constitutive relation between the self and the good, whereby an appreciation of the good, and therefore the ability to choose in terms of it, is enabled by self-understanding. In Chapter Four I dismiss the possibility that we might conceive of the self as being naturally inclined towards the realisation of some foreordained good, thereby dismissing the possibility that any foreordained good or outcome can be understood as integrally part of the task of selfhood.

In Chapter Five I take up Kierkegaard’s notion of the self as a task. A thorough analysis of Kierkegaard’s corpus is not attempted; rather, I focus on the question of how understanding selfhood as a task may be the means to understand our establishing a renewed relationship with the ecological entity as integrally part of our task of being ethical.

For Kierkegaard, the task of selfhood is the task of realising an immanent potential, and it is a task which begins with the choice of the ethical life. But the notion of
choice at work in Kierkegaard’s account proves to be neither simple nor straightforward, as indeed does the notion of the ethical. For the self to choose the ethical in its dealings with the ecological entity must mean much more than some adjustment of its life choices in keeping with the hackneyed principles of conservation or sustainability. The ethical is not something which can be so simply conceived or indeed preconceived; moreover, Kierkegaard shows us that nor can it be so freely chosen. Rather, we are led to see that the ethical life must be understood as an immanent potential, and that the self must be understood as immanently, or indeed inherently, directed towards realising this potential.

By placing a stronger emphasis on selfhood as something that is actively and continuously created, Kierkegaard’s dialectic of selfhood builds significantly upon Taylor’s account of the self, and embracing the former consolidates our move beyond the latter. We find that the self is inherently directed towards the ethical life, however this must be towards an appreciation of the ethical which is not in any way foreordained. On the contrary, the ethical turns out to be something which the self must find within itself, and thereby articulate for itself. Part of its task, therefore, is to articulate the limits of the ethical. To articulate these limits is now seen to be no longer the preserve of the philosopher: rather, it is the task of any self, and ultimately every individual self.

The limits of the ethical is the key point that returns us to our original question. Hugo proposed that an ecological ethic would be the ‘corollary and complement to human ethics.’ We can now see that Hugo’s ‘great ethic, scarcely perceived as yet’ is not something which we should expect ‘will at length break forth into the light.’ Rather, the question of there being a moral dimension to our relationship with the ecological entity is one which the individual must settle. Environmental responsibility, in its fullest sense as much more than a matter of prudence, is something which can only be understood as intrinsically part of selfhood.
1. Re-examining the possibility of an ecological ethic.

1.1. Introduction.

The contemporary effort to derive an ecological ethic is examined in this chapter. It is found to be unsuccessful: an ecological ethic proves to be elusive. It is the reasons for its failure, however, that are most informative: it is found that the purposeful attempt to derive an ethic of any sort is a spurious undertaking. The failure of the contemporary effort indicates the need to raise more fundamental questions, and to do so constitutes an alternative approach which is advocated in this chapter.

1.2. Postulating foundations for a new ethic.

Ecophilosophy examines our interrelationship with non-human entities. Environmental ethics can be regarded as a subsidiary field in that it examines the moral basis for this interrelationship; what it seeks to establish are the conditions under which a normative interrelationship might obtain. While the normative may be understood in different senses, environmental ethics has in general been concerned with that strict sense of the normative in which it entails obligation, be it an obligation directly towards the non-human entity per se, or indirectly towards each other through our dealings with non-human entities. One ultimate aim of environmental ethics is to derive an ecological ethic, which may be defined as an ethical system in which the ecological entity per se might be recognised as having normative status.

For the purposes of this study, the ecological entity will be defined as the non-sentient non-human entity. The negative qualifiers that define the ecological entity indicate that the term is intended to denote an entity that is excluded from consideration by established ethical systems. The ‘human’ is intended to denote not just the human being but also artefacts, and the non-human therefore excludes entities that are cultural, agricultural or horticultural. The definition of the ecological entity is intentionally broad, allowing for the possibility that the entity may be individual or
collective, tangible or abstract. Thus, it is our putative obligation to such things as
trees, forests, species and ecosystems that is the concern of an ecological ethic.
Should they obtain, our obligations regarding such entities would be a function of
their having normative status. Establishing the normative status of the ecological
entity has been the recalcitrant problem with which contemporary environmental
ethics has largely been preoccupied.

The ecological entity is defined in such a way as to represent those entities excluded
by traditional Kantian or deontological ethical systems. This study is not concerned
with the sentient being, and the set of ecological entities is therefore a subset of the set
of non-human entities with which the broader field of ecophilosophy in general is
concerned, which latter might also include animals. Being exclusively concerned
with the ecological entity, this study is not concerned with the rights-based ethical
systems which have been derived from the traditional frameworks and which cater for
the interests of the sentient. Extending the language of rights to the non-sentient,
while it has been attempted,\textsuperscript{3,4,5} is a contentious issue, and one which this study does
not address. Passmore asserts that ‘the idea of rights is simply not applicable to what
is not human,’\textsuperscript{6} since the idea of rights presupposes an ability to ‘recognise mutual
obligations.’\textsuperscript{6} Much more than the ascription of rights, an ecological ethic, should
such a thing be tenable, must be the framework within which fundamental questions
about the entity are addressed, and indeed this is what the contemporary effort has
sought to do.

The central question of environmental ethics is whether there is, or can be, an
ecological ethic.\textsuperscript{7} For the purposes of this study the latter is defined rigorously as an
ethic that articulates principles entailing the normative status of the ecological entity,

\textsuperscript{3} Stone, C. 1972 and 1974. Stone argues that society should ‘give’ rights to ‘natural objects in the
environment – indeed, to the natural environment as a whole.’ (1974, page 9). His is a legal argument
that such rights should be ‘given’, not a philosophical argument that their ascription has some basis that
we could identify.
\textsuperscript{4} Nash, 1990. Nash argues that societies have historically been slow to recognise right-holders, and that
the fact that natural entities are not ascribed rights is an historical omission that needs to be redressed.
His justification, however, is on prudential not moral grounds.
\textsuperscript{5} Hargrove (1992) cites many articles that appeared during the first five years of the journal
\textit{Environmental Ethics} which attempted to formulate a theory supporting the ascription of rights to
nature. His opinion is that none of them succeed.
\textsuperscript{6} Passmore, 1974: page 116.
\textsuperscript{7} This question is the title of a seminal paper by Rolston, 1975.
in the strict sense of normativity as entailing obligation. As such, an ecological ethic would be one among various ethical systems that environmental ethics, as a field of ecophilosophical endeavour, might seek to derive; the question of whether there can be an ecological ethic is considered to be distinct from alternative strands of environmental ethics that are not primarily concerned with the normative in the strict sense of the obligatory. These latter may include environmental virtue ethics,\(^8\) or those based upon merely prudential concerns. An ecological ethic is distinguished from other strands of environmental ethics on the basis of its satisfying two conditions: firstly that it would speak for the ecological entity, and secondly that it presupposes the normative status of that entity to be demonstrable.\(^9\) The question of whether or not there can be an ecological ethic reduces to the question of whether or not the normative status of the ecological entity can be demonstrated.

The demonstrable normative status of the ecological entity presupposes that some identifiable principle will function as its basis. Such a principle would reflect something other than agreeability or usefulness to morally considerable beings, and as such would be the basis for the derivation of specific ought statements governing our behaviour towards ecological entities. An ecological ethic, should such an ethic be tenable, would identify and argue for this principle, as well as deriving from it more specific ethical claims concerning our relationship with the ecological entity. Only thus could the ecological entity be established as directly, and therefore genuinely, morally considerable. This is in contrast to somehow extending to the entity some status or recognition, which in itself must be a problematic undertaking since it is not clear how it could be a reflection of anything other than usefulness or agreeableness to ourselves. The principle at which an ecological ethic is aimed is by definition independent of any such considerations.

With very few exceptions,\(^10\) all contemporary efforts to derive an ecological ethic concur that the fundamental principle is some notion of the good. Rather than being

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\(^8\) It is regarded as a separate question as to whether we can conceive of an environmental virtue ethics. This question is explored in Chapter Four.

\(^9\) Regan (1981), lays out two conditions for an ethic that is environmental *per se*. They are firstly that there are nonhuman beings that have moral standing, and secondly that the class of such beings includes but is larger than the class of conscious beings.

\(^10\) For example, the rights-based accounts of Stone (1972, 1974) and Nash (1990), and more recently, virtue ethics approaches. The latter are considered in Chapter Four of this study.
based upon some good that the entity has for us (due to its being useful or agreeable to us), our obligations in dealing with the ecological entity are based upon some good that the entity has, or more rigorously, is in and of itself. As such, the entity could be said to be an instantiation of the good. Any obligation based upon the good that the entity has for us, or more generally for morally considerable beings, could only ultimately be one towards other morally considerable beings.\textsuperscript{11} In contrast, an obligation to the entity \textit{per se}, should it obtain, would be based upon the good of the entity \textit{per se}. For such an approach, the good is prior to the right and an ecological ethic could therefore be understood as teleological or consequentialist, as contrasted with deontological ethical theories.\textsuperscript{12} In the contemporary literature, the question of any obligation that might obtain in our interrelationship with the ecological entity has taken the form that what is right (or wrong) about our actions should be derivable from what is good about the entity.

1.3. Establishing the normative status of the ecological entity.

An ecological ethic would seek to account for the good that is instantiated by the ecological entity as the basis for its inclusion within the sphere of moral concern.\textsuperscript{13} As the basis for inclusion, the good would justify and indeed necessitate inclusion; it is intended to function as the basis for the normative ought, one that we would be obliged to acknowledge, whose normative force would be our inability to conscientiously treat the entity in a manner that disregards its being an instantiation of the good. As such, the good of the ecological entity would be our means to articulate the necessary and sufficient conditions for normative status. In general, examinations seeking to understand just what it can mean for the good to function as a basis for normative status have amounted to an examination of what it is that is good about the entity, such that the good might be represented by a criterion or set of criteria. To this

\textsuperscript{11} Stated in general terms, it is those beings sufficiently like us in that respect which makes \textit{us} morally considerable. Whether or not this includes future generations of humans is a question that is addressed by Golding (1972).

\textsuperscript{12} According to Rawls’ formulation of the distinction. An agent-relative vs. agent-neutral mapping of the distinction would concur, though the distinction according to this formulation is not as clear. Some understand the distinction differently, for example: Palmer, 2003. Further discussion of this follows in Section 1.9.

\textsuperscript{13} The notion of the sphere of moral concern, and in particular of the possibility of expanding it, is attributed to Singer, who argued for its expansion to include sentient non-humans. Singer, 1976: page 271.
end, much of the early literature in the field was concerned to establish some ‘ethically enfranchising property or characteristic’,\textsuperscript{14} or normative criterion, that would represent the good that the non-human entity instantiates, and in virtue of which it would be afforded normative status. Their aim was that the good that is instantiated by the ecological entity might be established in some objective sense.

Environmental ethics is marked by a singular failure to resolve the question of how the good of the ecological entity should be conceived or why it should be identified with that entity. The aim has been to establish what it is that is true of the entity and can therefore be predicated of it, a property that would be generally recognised and agreed upon. While several normative criteria have been proposed as granting the entity admission to the sphere of moral concern, and while the debate has converged on the few that are most plausible, none have succeeded unequivocally. The set of ecological entities that would be represented by an environmental ethic varies with the conception of the criterion that establishes the ecological entity as having normative status, and disagreement as to what the criterion should be is at the same time disagreement as to which entities should be represented. While the criterion for normative status should ideally stand independently of any preconceived notions as to the set of entities to which this status should be afforded, the conceptual priority that such independence would require is difficult to establish, and it is far from clear that any criterion can be defined in virtue of which a distinct set of entities with normative status would be demarcated.

Various criteria have been postulated as representing the good instantiated by the ecological entity, hence establishing its normative status. These include attributes of individual entities, as well as more nebulous qualities pertaining to abstract entities. The individual entity has been the concern of those approaches to ethics which have been termed ‘ethical conativism’;\textsuperscript{15} the attributes that have been postulated include autopoiesis,\textsuperscript{16} the ability to flourish,\textsuperscript{17} or merely being alive.\textsuperscript{18} The abstract entity

\textsuperscript{14} Callicott, 1993a: page 9.
\textsuperscript{15} Fox, 1995: page 168.
\textsuperscript{16} Autopoiesis is the capacity of living systems to ‘continuously strive to produce and sustain their own organisational structure and activity.’ Fox, 1995: page 169.
\textsuperscript{17} Attfield, 1983 and 1987. Attfield uncouples the ability to flourish as the exercise of the basic capacities of a species from the utilitarian principle of the ability to experience pleasure and pain, thus
(identifiable in terms of some interrelationship between individual entities, such as would define a community or an ecosystem) has been the concern of the so-called ‘holistic’ approaches,\(^{19}\),\(^{20}\),\(^{21}\) and the criteria they have proposed have appealed to our intuitions about what is right about natural environments. The qualities which these latter approaches have proposed as potential normative criteria include diversity,\(^ {22}\) stability,\(^ {22}\),\(^ {23}\) complexity,\(^ {22}\) beauty,\(^ {22}\),\(^ {24}\) harmony,\(^ {22}\) intricacy,\(^ {22}\) richness,\(^ {22}\) naturalness,\(^ {25}\) and wildness.\(^ {26}\)

A common tendency of these various accounts is to appeal to our intuitions about what is right about natural environments. By so doing, they can be considered to reiterate Leopold’s maxim:

‘A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.’\(^ {27}\)

But Leopold’s maxim, while undoubtedly influential,\(^ {28}\) cannot be taken as gospel. Appealing to our intuitions does not guarantee its being a good foundation for a rigorous philosophical account. What is ‘right’ about natural environments is not an innocent term: something may be morally right, or naturally right, or simply natural. To rely too heavily upon Leopold’s maxim is to risk falling foul of the naturalistic fallacy.\(^ {29}\)

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allowing for organisms to be morally considerable irrespective of their level of sentience. It is open to interpretation as to whether this notion is distinct from autopoiesis.

\(^ {18}\) Goodpaster, 1978: page 310.

\(^ {19}\) Fox notes that these approaches might be called ‘ethical holism’ or ‘ecosystem ethics’ or ‘ecosphere ethics’ or even ‘Gaian ethics.’ Fox, 1995: pp. 176-177.

\(^ {20}\) To the extent that he considers the whole ecosystem to have normative status, Rodman can be understood to take a holistic approach. Rodman, 1977.

\(^ {21}\) Callicott also proposed that the ecosystem has normative status, asserting that an ‘environmental ethic is holistic or collective.’ Callicott, 1988: page 37.

\(^ {22}\) Elliot, 1992.

\(^ {23}\) Lemons, 1981.

\(^ {24}\) Austin, 1985.

\(^ {25}\) Brennan, 1984.

\(^ {26}\) Hettinger and Throop, 1999.

\(^ {27}\) Leopold, 1968: pp. 224-5.

\(^ {28}\) Nash notes that ‘Leopold is rightly regarded as the most important source of modern biocentric or holistic ethics.’ Nash, 1990: page 70.

\(^ {29}\) Moore coins this phrase. Moore notes that ‘good’ is a notion that resists definition or analysis, and the attempt to establish a normative claim by appealing to a definition of the good in terms of some natural property is the naturalistic fallacy. Moore, 1993: pp. 62-6. An alternative formulation, less rigorous than Moore’s, would be that what is natural is inherently good or right.
Pervasively cited in the ecophilosophical literature, Leopold’s maxim can be understood as having inspired the contemporary accounts which seek to establish the normative status of the ecological entity. However, the maxim implies several separate and substantial questions which demand to be resolved, and those contemporary accounts which adopt the maxim face the charge that their failure to distinguish or acknowledge these substantial questions results in different issues being conflated. Thus, there is the question of whether what is right can be inferred from what is good about the ecosystem; if the morally right or good is intended, then the question of their relative priority arises. A second question is whether what is morally right or good can be read off some state of affairs of the ecosystem, and a failure to acknowledge this question leaves the account open to the naturalistic fallacy objection. Any account which adopts Leopold’s maxim as a valid assumption must address these substantial questions.

The substantial questions implicit in Leopold’s maxim are not addressed by the contemporary accounts which have sought to establish a single criterion for normative status. Rather, the tendency has been to maintain an exclusive focus on the criterion per se, seeking simply to argue the case for the particular criterion which has been proposed. But simply sidestepping the difficult questions merely invites objection on several other counts. Thus, in their efforts to articulate a criterion for normative status that would apply generally, accounts appearing early in the literature have struggled to propose a criterion that is non-trivial. Generality too easily descends into triviality. For example, it has been proposed that ‘X’s being a living thing is both necessary and sufficient for moral considerability’. A similarly problematic account is one that argues for ‘all wild forms of life in the Earth’s biosphere …being viewed as the appropriate objects of the attitude of respect and …accordingly regarded as entities possessing inherent worth.’ These are criteria with little scope for any critical leverage.

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30 Callicott has a collection of essays devoted to elaborating upon Leopold’s land ethic which adopts the maxim without raising the substantial questions implicit therein. Callicott, 1988.
31 Goodpaster, 1978: page 313.
33 Criteria so general as these would suggest that we should regard feral, noxious, invasive and pathogenic life-forms as worthy of respect.
Accounts appearing later in the literature postulate more abstract criteria but do not address the difficult questions, and there is a tendency to retreat to more abstract criteria rather than to raise more fundamental questions. The assumption, or the hope, would seem to be that there might be some higher-order feature or non-physical property of the ecological entity, distinct from its non-normative ‘natural’ properties, which might somehow circumvent both the naturalistic fallacy objection and the triviality objection. The hope would seem to be that there may be an ‘is’ which implies how we ought to behave towards the entity. This strand of the debate has converged upon a more abstract criterion variously formulated as intrinsic value, inherent worth, inherent value or inherent goodness. But the difficult questions cannot simply be sidestepped. To do so, as we shall see, is to invite further objections.

1.4. The broader implications of an expanding sphere.

Aiming to conceive of the criterion for normative status as some higher-order feature of the ecological entity, the contemporary approaches would seem to regard it as analogous to those attributes (such as rationality and sentience) that established ethical systems would hold to be the basis for humans and animals being morally considerable. But it is not sufficient to simply regard it as being analogous: to reconceive the sphere of moral concern on the basis of some new attribute has implications for the criteria by which that sphere had originally been conceived. We cannot simply add in an extra term, and expect that the result will be a broadening of the sphere; we cannot simply append the ‘ethically enfranchising property’ of the ecological entity to our already accepted normative terms. To raise the possibility of a new normative term must therefore be to also raise the question of its interrelationship with those normative terms already established and accepted as such.

If some higher-order feature of the ecological entity is to function as a criterion for its normative status, then this feature must be in some way coordinate with the established criteria for normative status. We can see that this is true of Singer’s

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34 The numerous accounts of this notion are discussed later in this chapter.
36 Regan, 1981a; and 1981b: pp. 30-34.
expansion of the sphere of moral concern: sentience is the criterion which he proposes as the basis for animals being morally considerable. This we can understand as being coordinate with those criteria for humans being morally considerable, whether we understand the latter criteria to be rationality, or being the subject of a life, or some similar notion. Ultimately, we might say that rationality is a species of sentience, and that an expansion of the sphere is necessarily by placing the established and accepted criteria in a broader context. If the sphere is to be expanded to include the ecological entity as morally considerable, then we must be able to understand the putative higher-order feature of the latter as coordinate with sentience and rationality in such as way that some more generic property can be identified of which all of these are species.

To consider a ‘new’ normative term is necessarily to reconsider the status of the established normative terms; the question of a ‘new’ normative term must be the question of clarifying the established terms. And indeed a perceived need for a reassessment of the established normative terms must be acknowledged as having motivated the effort to derive an ecological ethic: perceived to be too narrow in their ambit and therefore too limiting, the existing normative criteria have, in a sense, been called into question. Thus, usurping the anthropocentrism that informs traditional conceptions of normativity is seen as one of the central tasks of environmental ethics. Overcoming the anthropocentrism of established ethical systems has been presented as the need for a shift to ‘ecocentrism,’ and to articulate this ‘shift’ has been identified as the task of articulating an ecological ethic. To formulate the broader context within which we might reassess the established (anthropocentric) normative terms as this simple dichotomy is to present it in only the most general of senses, and is to say very little.

37 Singer’s criterion for sentience is an ability to experience suffering, which entails that the animal has interests. Singer, 1976: pp. 8-9, 23-25.
38 Regan (1988) argues that sentience is a sufficient but not necessary condition for moral standing.
39 Fox, 1995: Chapter 1.
41 Drengson describes the necessary shift as a paradigm shift, from ‘the technocratic to the person-planetary paradigm.’ Drengson, 1980.
While anthropocentrism can be understood in different senses, in the current context it must be taken to be the view that only human beings have normative status. Ecocentrism, defined in contrast, is the view that the entities with normative status are not exclusively human, nor necessarily sentient. Ecocentrism is therefore the view that the sphere of moral concern in fact extends to include the ecological entity. But if the contemporary debate is to successfully follow Singer’s logic in thus expanding the sphere, then it must address the question of how the expanded sphere can still encompass the sphere as originally conceived (or indeed, perceived). Thus, it must account for the ecological entity as having some feature which is coordinate with such attributes as sentience and rationality, and in such a way that we can understand that feature in terms of its interrelationship with the accepted and established attributes. This point, however, is neglected by the ecophilosophical literature. Rather than examining the implications of redefining the sphere of moral concern, there is instead a tendency to assume that ecocentrism might simply supplant anthropocentrism.

The bare assertion of ecocentrism means very little. Taken to the extreme, it has been the claim that humans should be displaced from the centre of the sphere of moral concern, such that the ecological entity has comparable moral standing with human beings. Thus, Taylor has claimed that the killing of a wildflower can be worse than the killing of a human, for example if the former is a purely wanton act and the latter is in self-defence. But there is little substance to arguments which merely assert that the ecological entity should be afforded a moral standing that is equal or equivalent to our own. They cannot even claim to appeal to our intuitions.

A genuinely ecocentric account would be one which places the established and accepted normative terms in a broader context, thereby establishing the need for a reappraisal of those terms, as well as the possibility of so doing. We cannot simply adopt Leopold’s maxim as a viable statement of ecocentrism without addressing the difficult questions as to what it could mean to postulate that the normative status of the ecological entity should be reconceived. To be committed to the view that there is

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43 Shrader-Frechette, 2003 identifies four non-anthropocentric approaches: extensionist, zoocentrist, biocentrist, and ecocentrist. These are intended to represent, progressively, varying degrees of expansion of the circle of ethical concern. For simplicity we can regard ecocentrism as antonymous to anthropocentrism. This is consistent with the definition offered by Fox, 1995 (page 117).
some higher-order feature of the ecological entity which would afford it normative status is to be committed to addressing these questions.

1.5. Intrinsic value as a foundational principle.

Seeking to account for the inclusion of the ecological entity within the sphere of moral concern, the more recent accounts have converged on the question of its value. It is clear that the value of the ecological entity can be understood in many ways and moreover that it must be understood in some non-trivial way if fundamental questions about our normative terms are to be addressed.

Instrumental value is among the most basic of values with which the ecological entity might be ascribed. We can understand instrumental value as the basis for a prudential environmental ethic whose injunctions are relatively straightforward and unproblematic, appealing to the value of ecological well-being for our own well-being. The ecological entity is apprehended simply as a resource, and one which we have some obligation (to ourselves and each other) to conserve or preserve. For some environmental ethicists, the distinction between conservation and preservation is important because it marks the distinction between an active and a passive approach to the ecological entity: implicit in resource preservation is a passive non-interference in the patterns of existence of natural entities, while implicit in resource conservation is the possibility that an active intervention may enhance the instrumental value of the resource. Consistent with this distinction though not explicitly acknowledging it is the claim that the instrumental value of the ecological entity is sufficient to justify its preservation. Valid though such arguments are, the ethic so articulated is only ever prudential, never normative in any substantial sense, and the normative status of the ecological entity does not enter into consideration. Our obligations articulated by such an ethic are directly to each other, never directly to the ecological entity.

46 Fox, 1995: page 154-155. Fox bases his distinction on the etymology of the words (‘pre-service’ as contrasted with ‘together-with in service’).
47 Godfrey-Smith, 1979. Godfrey-Smith’s argument, later augmented and elaborated by Fox (1995: pp.156-160), expounds the different interested perspectives that will instrumentally value the environment; hence, the ‘silo’ argument, the ‘laboratory’ argument, the ‘gymnasium’ argument, and the ‘cathedral’ argument (with subsequent additions to the list by Fox).
While its ascription is unproblematic for value theory, there is a general tendency to view ordinary instrumental valuing of the ecological entity as the basis for the very thing we need to overcome. With this in mind, many accounts have sought to understand valuing in a sense more fundamental than this most basic sense of valuing, and prior to the values that would correspond to expressions of mere preference, of subjective like and dislike. What they have sought is a sense of value which is in some way prior to, and more substantial than instrumental value. Moreover, they have sought to establish this as being in some way prior to any instrumental valuing of the ecological entity, and in such a way that it might be established as the basis for its normative status.

The idea that the natural entity might have value which is prior to its instrumental value, and is therefore possessed in some way by the entity in and of itself, can be traced to Muir. In 1901 he stated that rattlesnakes were ‘good for themselves, and we need not begrudge them their share of life.’\textsuperscript{48} Muir’s initial inspiration, however, was the non-sentient entity, being a cluster of orchids in the Canadian wilderness which may have ‘lived, bloomed, and died unseen,’\textsuperscript{49} a possibility which for Muir did not detract in any way from their value. In other words, he considered them to have value which was independent of human interest. It is this point which has inspired one major strand of the ecophilosophical literature.

The literature has converged on the question of the value which the ecological entity might have independently of our needs, wants, desires or interests. Many and various accounts have sought to establish this sense of value, and to draw out its significance for understanding the ecological entity as having normative status. In his influential article \textit{The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic,}\textsuperscript{50} Regan argues that all natural objects, whether living or not, have inherent value.\textsuperscript{51, 52} Regan then makes the stronger claim that ‘the development of what can properly be called an environmental ethic requires that we postulate inherent value in nature.’\textsuperscript{53} Similarly, O’Neill claims

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Nash, page 39.
\item Regan, 1981b.
\item Regan, 1981b: page 33.
\item Regan later retreated from this view, claiming that the entity must have experience, since it is either pleasure or satisfaction of preferences that is intrinsically good. Regan, 1983: pp. 147-8, 235-6.
\item Regan, 1981b: page 34.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
that ‘to hold an environmental ethic is to hold that non-human beings and states of affairs in the natural world have intrinsic value.’\(^54\) Elliot makes the strong claim that there is an inherent connection between the intrinsic value of the ecological entity and our obligation towards it.\(^55\) While the terminology in the earlier literature shifted between such terms as inherent value and inherent goodness, the later literature has tended to converge on the notion of *intrinsic value*. Establishing the reality and the implications of the intrinsic value of the ecological entity has become the central concern of this strand of ecophilosophy.

Intrinsic value has been put forward as the notion which we need to understand if we are to account for the normative status of the ecological entity. A seemingly innocuous term is therefore being touted as the central term in a substantial philosophical question, and a substantial sense of intrinsic value is therefore implied. One possibility would seem to be that the intrinsic value of the ecological entity is some kind of value that we have hitherto failed to fully appreciate, that we have not yet allowed as a possible influence on our experience, and for which we require a philosophical account. If such an account is indeed required and is tenable, then it must engage with fundamental questions about value. To examine intrinsic value as a philosophical question is necessarily to raise these fundamental questions.

1.6. Raising some fundamental questions about intrinsic value.

Intrinsic value can be understood in different ways. The notion is somewhat nebulous, and any serious account of it must be clear about which sense is intended. But not all accounts which seek to pin the normative status of the ecological entity to its intrinsic value are clear about what they understand intrinsic value to mean. Indeed, most leave the notion undefined. Moreover, most seem to regard intrinsic value as the opposite of instrumental value, and our coming to understand the intrinsic value of the ecological entity as being the first step towards mitigating our valuing it instrumentally (where the latter is regarded as having been to the detriment of the ecological entity). But it cannot be assumed that there is a simple dichotomy of values here. Korsgaard notes that this is a false contrast: intrinsic value and


\(^{55}\) Elliot does not demonstrate how this might be so. Elliot, 1992: pp. 148-151.
instrumental value should not be treated as correlatives because they belong to two
different distinctions.  

Korsgaard distinguishes two distinctions in goodness. On the one hand, she
distinguishes intrinsic and extrinsic goodness, and on the other hand, she distinguishes
final goods and instrumental goods. She notes that the latter distinction can also be
formulated as that between ends and means. The salient point for the question of the
normative status of the ecological entity is that there is no natural contrast between
instrumental and intrinsic value, and it will not suffice simply to define intrinsic value
as non-instrumental value. If intrinsic value is to be the basis for our understanding
the ecological entity as having normative status, then an account must be given of just
what is meant.

Rather than trying to elaborate what it might mean to regard the ecological entity as a
final good or an end (the natural correlative of instrumental value), the
ecophilosophical literature has converged on the notion of intrinsic value. The
tendency seems to be one of seeking to discover what it is about the ecological entity
which might provide us with reason why we should regard it as having normative
status. There is a tendency in this strand of the literature to regard intrinsic value as
something any sufficiently rational subject could and should be expected to perceive.
That is, there is a tendency to regard intrinsic value as something which the ecological
entity carries with it, such that it is objectively real in some sense. This, however, is a
strong thesis, and one that must be justified. But no justification is provided in this
strand of the literature.

There are various ways in which we could conceive of a value as having a degree of
objectivity. One possibility is to understand objectivity in the sense of ‘secondary
properties, unanchored in reality, but a regular part of our experience in virtue of our
constitution.’ Colour is the analogy here: our perception of colour is in virtue of our
physiological constitution, while a different constitution would perceive a different

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Another possibility is to understand objectivity as a matter or social or cultural convention. Gold is the analogy in this case: our perceiving it as precious is informed by our social and cultural conditioning. These are projectivist accounts, whereby either the physiological subject or the cultural subject projects upon the entity the values through which it is perceived.

It is difficult to see how a projectivist account of intrinsic value can offer us much. Even if it were the case that our perceiving the ecological entity to be intrinsically valuable were a matter of fact, an explanation of why this is the case is not going to offer much. Moreover, it is our tendency as a culture to undervalue the ecological entity that is at issue in the ecophilosophical accounts of intrinsic value, none of which propose any form of projectivist account.

If we are to find any meaningful content in the notion of intrinsic value, then we need to be clear about just which definition of it is intended. To this end, Korsgaard’s distinction is a good place to start. It is clear that the ecophilosophical literature, by contrasting intrinsic and instrumental value, has tended to conflate two senses of intrinsic value which belong to two different distinctions, as Korsgaard defines them. We can allow for this error, and then seek to draw out the sense of intrinsic value that is intended in the attempt to establish normative status. If it is conceived as something objectively real which any sufficiently rational subject could and should be expected to perceive, then intrinsic value would seem to be the notion that the ecological entity has goodness in itself. This is a substantial sense of intrinsic value which is a thesis about the location or source of the good. It means that the intrinsically valuable thing is good absolutely or unconditionally, such that it is good under any and all conditions and the world is a better place because of that thing. 59

The corollary of this strong sense of intrinsic value is that our being ethical towards the ecological entity is in response to an attribute we perceive it to have.

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58 The description of colour as a ‘secondary quality’ can be attributed to Locke while the analogy with evaluation is attributed to Hume.
Korsgaard notes that Kant drew a distinction between conditional and unconditional goods, but concluded that only the good will could be unconditionally good. 60 She notes that Moore allows for more than just the good will might carry intrinsic goodness: Moore assigned intrinsic goodness to such things as ‘aesthetic appreciation, friendship, and in general the things we ought to pursue as ends.’ 61 But there is a stronger Moorean sense of intrinsic value which is closer to that which would seem to be intended by the ecophilosophical accounts. Moore held that one ‘might value something as an end ... in response to its intrinsic goodness, but a thing’s possession of intrinsic goodness is quite independent of whether anyone cares about it or not.’ 62 Moore defined intrinsic value as follows:

‘To say that a kind of value is ‘intrinsic’ means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question.’ 63

Moore’s definition prompts the question as to how we should understand ‘the intrinsic nature of the thing.’ This might be understood as its non-relational properties, properties that the thing has independently of any other thing. But this definition defers the problem of intrinsic value to the problem of the intrinsic nature of the thing, and thereby merely substitutes one difficult problem for another. Identifying the intrinsic nature of an entity would require a solution to the perennial problem of natural kinds; ultimately, the question of whether there exists any intrinsic nature, and the problem of natural kinds, are one and the same. 64, 65, 66 However, it is not necessary to enter into the problem of natural kinds in order to see that a proposal that Moorean intrinsic value might account for the normative status of the ecological entity, far from resolving the problem, merely defers it.

A Moorean account of intrinsic value faces the challenge that it defers explanation to obscure metaphysical assertions which merely compound the need for explanation. 67

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60 Korsgaard, 1983: page 178.
63 Moore, 1922: page 260.
64 Wilkerson, 1998.
67 Some writers defend the concept on Moorean grounds nevertheless; for example, Zimmerman, 1999.
Indeed, the intrinsic nature of an entity, identified by its intrinsic properties, is an unsuccessful account of intrinsic value because it is not an explanation at all; this account defines but does not explain intrinsic value. Bernstein notes that in such an account, intrinsic value is the definiendum for which intrinsic nature is proposed as the definiens, but intrinsic nature does not explain anything unless or until it can itself be explained. O’Neill notes that there is no explanation as to what an intrinsic property would be nor which properties are non-relational in a way that they would qualify as intrinsic. Elliot notes that it is properties that clearly do not meet this condition that intuition suggests should be among those that would underpin any intrinsic value an entity might have: relational properties such as rarity, being naturally evolved, or being an exemplar of a kind. Thus, far from reflecting our pre-philosophical intuitions about intrinsic value, the Moorean account is at odds with them.

Intrinsic value is generally recognised as a problematic basis for the normative status of the ecological entity, nevertheless no alternative criterion for normative status has emerged to displace intrinsic value as the basis for an ecological ethic. Thus, ‘the central and most recalcitrant problem for environmental ethics is the problem of constructing an adequate theory of intrinsic value for nonhuman natural entities and for nature as a whole.’

1.7. Begging the question of normative status.

If the strong Moorean sense of intrinsic value is untenable as a basis for the normative status of the ecological entity, then we need to consider an alternative formulation. One such is that which is the genuine correlative of instrumental value. As Korsgaard observes, the genuine distinction is between means and ends. Thus, a thing can be valued instrumentally as a means to an end, or alternatively it can be valued as an end in itself. It is the latter possibility which concerns us here, whereby the thing would be a final good, thus valued for its own sake.

70 Elliot, 1992: page 139.
71 Callicott, 1985: page 257.
A thing’s being valued as an end proves to be quite different to its having intrinsic value in the sense of carrying its goodness with it. The thing thus valued might still be considered to be objectively good because the world is a better place because of it, if it contributes to ‘the actual goodness of the world’, but this need not mean that it is objectively good in the strong sense that it carries its goodness with it and its goodness can therefore be attributed to its intrinsic value. Indeed, the thing may be extrinsically rather than intrinsically good, if its goodness is derived from, or conditional upon external conditions, or in other words, if the thing is conditionally good and the conditions are met. The key point is that to say that a thing is valued as an end is a thesis which concerns the way we value a thing, not the inherent or intrinsic nature of that thing. It is ‘a judgement applying to real particulars.’

The thing which is valued as an end can be understood as the object of a rational and justified choice, thus a choice which any sufficiently rational subject could and should be expected to make. We can now see that this is quite a different thing to intrinsic value in the strong Moorean sense, where it is the goodness of the object that makes the choice rational and justified. Rather, ‘it is the reasoning that goes into the choice itself – the procedures of full justification – that determines the rationality of the choice and certifies the goodness of the object.’ We do not have to set about the ontological or metaphysical task of assessing the thing chosen, because the thesis does not concern the nature of the thing but the way we value it.

To value a thing as an end in itself might be to regard it as intrinsically valuable, if we allow a looser sense of intrinsic value which is not, strictly speaking, the correlative of instrumental value. If it is this looser sense of intrinsic value which is intended by the ecophilosophical accounts which seek to establish the normative status of the ecological entity, then they do not make this clear. Moreover, there is a tendency to argue for reasons as to why the ecological entity might be a candidate for being valued as a final end by appealing to its attributes. But this is to conflate the two senses of intrinsic value which Korsgaard has carefully distinguished: it seeks to combine the notion of valuing something as an end with the notion of a thing deriving its value from its attributes. Indeed, it merely reiterates the error which we have

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examined earlier: namely, to identify the ‘ethically enfranchising property’ of the ecological entity.

If we seek to understand intrinsic value purely in the looser sense of valuing a thing as an end in itself, then it is not clear whether such a conception of intrinsic value can do any real work in the sense of affording any critical leverage. If any and all ecological entities were potentially valued as ends in themselves, then the possibility of drawing principled distinctions between them would seem to be defeated. If all ecological entities could equally be ascribed intrinsic value, then we would simply be left with subjective preference in seeking to differentiate among them.\(^3\)

Some examples illustrate the point. Certain distinctions between ecological entities would seem to be ‘natural’ ones, for example that between native as opposed to domestic or feral flora and fauna. It might seem intuitively correct that we would value the native flora and fauna as ends in themselves, but not the feral flora and fauna. But the real world is not so clearly demarcated: there are plenty of native flora that are regarded (or disvalued) as invasive weeds, and there are many instances where the question arises as to whether or not native animals should be culled to alleviate starvation due to over-population. The problem is that on a purely theoretical level, individual plants and animals as well as species and ecosystems might qualify as ecological entities, so that any or all might be valued as ends in themselves. The notion of the thing as an end in itself offers little in resolving the conflicting value claims that might arise between individuals and species, or individuals and ecosystem. The dilemma arises that either all entities are valued as ends in themselves, or alternatively a subset of them are valued as ends, which raises the question of the basis upon which they are so valued. If it is a matter of mere preference, then the notion of intrinsic value (in its looser sense) would seem to offer little.

We might consider an extreme example: if all entities were potentially intrinsically valuable, then all would potentially be valued equally, and there could be no basis for distinguishing between the intrinsic value (and thus perhaps the right to life) of the

\(^3\)Regan, 1992: pp. 170-1.
human being and that of human pathogens such as the smallpox virus.\textsuperscript{74, 75} Responding to the counter-intuitiveness of this maximally abstracted and perhaps attenuated sense of intrinsic value, certain qualifications to the notion have been proposed in an attempt to establish it as a tenable criterion for normative status. The problem that intrinsic value would justify ‘unqualified egalitarianism [that] will lead to paralysis in situations of unavoidable conflict’\textsuperscript{76} has led some to propose that entities be ascribed \textit{differential} intrinsic value.\textsuperscript{77} A hierarchy of differential normative status thus established would rank one thing against another, enabling priorities to be decided in ethical deliberation.

Differential intrinsic value is intended as a weaker \textit{practical} principle that would supplement the theoretical principle.\textsuperscript{76} But it is not clear what a ‘practical principle’ might be, and how it is distinguished from the theoretical principle, or indeed if it can be understood as a principle at all. While some have claimed that ascribing organisms with differential intrinsic value should be based upon the organism’s complexity and capacity for richness of experience,\textsuperscript{78} it has been rejoined that this scale of differentiation would conveniently ‘map onto the phylogenetic scale in a predictably anthropocentric pattern.’\textsuperscript{79} That is, the notion would now seem to be a very fluid concept which can be adjusted to deliver the desired outcome of ethical deliberation, and if it amounts to nothing more than this then the concept of differential intrinsic value is doing no work at all.

It is far from clear how the notion of differential intrinsic value could function as a basis for principled differentiation between entities. The question it immediately prompts is what the basis is for the differentiation if it is not simply individual preference or some preconceived notion of which entities are the most intrinsically valuable. The challenge it must face is that it simply defers, but does not explain, the basis for differentiation. If intrinsic value must be differentiated by appeal to some

\textsuperscript{74} Ehrenfeld cites as an example of what he calls the ‘Noah Principle’ the uncompromising biocentrism of Bernard Dixon, who argued for ‘the guarded conservation of \textit{Variola}, the smallpox virus, as an endangered species.’ Ehrenfeld, 1978: pp. 208-9.
\textsuperscript{75} Nash reports that Lynn White also defended the right to life of the smallpox virus, though with a different justification to that of Ehrenfeld. Nash (1990): page 95.
\textsuperscript{76} Norton, 1991: page 224.
\textsuperscript{77} Fox, 1984: page 198.
\textsuperscript{79} Norton, 1991: page 224.
prior principle, then yet again the problem of normative status is deferred but not explained, while the priority of intrinsic value as a normative criterion is compromised. If intrinsic value is to be understood as a theoretical principle, prior to the ‘practical principles’ (should there be such things) that we would apply in everyday situations where we value things differentially, then it would seem that it must be something more than our valuing the ecological entity as an end in itself.

The notion of intrinsic value in the looser sense of our valuing things as ends would seem to be a weak notion that says very little. Alternatively, we are left with the strong sense of intrinsic value as a thesis about the nature of the valuable thing, but which is difficult to justify. It would seem that the idea of intrinsic value (or any special kind of value) is unworkable, and that if normative status is to be justified on the basis of any conception of value, then it must somehow emerge from the values that inform the understanding of the ecological entity as it falls within the broader context of the values and normative terms within which the subject orientates itself and by which it is enjoined to act in a certain manner. Observing that values are always parts of patterns and never self-sufficient or final, Weston criticises the tendency to take a reductive approach to values in nature: by reducing our interrelationship with the natural world to mere simplified ends, ‘the appeal to intrinsic values exemplifies precisely the cultural tendencies that environmental ethics needs to resist.’

1.8. Justifying evaluation.

Our encounter with the ecological entity will inevitably involve a broad range of evaluations. Thus, it is inevitable that our making decisions which impact upon the ecological entity will be on the basis of ranking competing claims. Our actions and decisions might be considered to be rational to the extent that we can justify them. Where the ecological entity is concerned, our actions and decisions are informed by an evaluation and might be considered rational to the extent that we can justify that evaluation. Thus, our decision to exploit the entity might be on the basis of an evaluation we might justify as expedient, while our decision to conserve it might be

on the basis of an evaluation we might justify as prudent. In each of these instances, the evaluation involved is instrumental, and if it is a matter of pure prudence or expediency, then the deliberation involved is not moral deliberation. As such, it does not engage the question of the normative status of the ecological entity, and therefore does not present us with a significant philosophical question.

The point in question is whether our decisions and actions which impact upon the ecological entity might be justified as moral or indeed denounced as immoral. Implicit in the notion of the strong sense of intrinsic value as a basis for normative status is a conception of the evaluation which is intrinsic value as one that is privileged in some way, such that it is not among the many and various ordinary evaluations over which we deliberate. Rather than being just one more possibility for ascribing value to the ecological entity, it would seem to be intended to mean something which lies behind our valuing the entity, thus as a more general evaluation, being one which will automatically obtain in any instance of deliberation that involves the ecological entity. In this strong sense, intrinsic value would seem to be intended to function as that to which we might appeal in deliberating over conflicting value claims involving the ecological entity, such that it would be the rational justification for our preserving or protecting the ecological entity. Rather than being among the evaluations that require rational justification, it is the justification to which we would appeal.

Justifying an evaluation is a question of justifying it as rational, thus as one which we have good reason to make. An evaluation is a value claim, and to justify the evaluation is to justify the value claim as one that is valid. One way of so doing is to appeal to more general values: to appeal to some more fundamental notion of value or of the good as something that underpins our evaluation is to appeal to a linear model of reason giving, in which a rational justification would be the appeal to the more fundamental value. This, however, cannot be an infinite regress:

‘At the end, if this linear search for reasons is pursued, there will have to be at least one practice of reason-giving for which no reason is given and which holds itself up.’

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81 Williams, 1985: page 113.
Ultimately, we must come up against evaluations so general as to be elusive to justification by the linear model.

The problem of justifying a general evaluation is illustrated by a Classical paradox. In Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro*, Socrates challenges Euthyphro’s proposal that ‘the pious’ might be defined as ‘the god-loved.’ Socrates asks: ‘is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because they love it?’ Socrates’ main point in the discussion that follows is that there is no definitive answer to this question, and the paradox would seem to be irreducible. While *Euthyphro* cannot necessarily be read as a refutation of ethical theories which appeal to notions of goodness or piety or rightness, it can be interpreted as an exploration of the problem of providing rational justification for general notions of the good. A Euthyphro problem can be defined as any that has the paradoxical form of that which is illustrated by *Euthyphro*.

*Euthyphro* raises the question of the justification of that which would itself be justification. The values in question in *Euthyphro* are the most fundamental of values: indeed, so fundamental that their only justification would be their being foreordained by the gods. To the extent that intrinsic value is intended to function as such a fundamental evaluation, the question of its justification must arise.

As Regan observes in a paper entitled ‘Does Environmental Ethics Rest on a Mistake?’, the conception of an environmental ethic as providing grounds for appropriate respect for and duties to natural entities by appealing to their intrinsic value imposes upon theories of intrinsic value requirements they are unable to meet. The problem is providing justification for an evaluation which is itself intended to function as a justification. The alternative must be that if intrinsic value is simply our valuing the ecological entity as an end in itself, then it is a trivial notion which could require no justification at all and which contributes little to the question of the normative status of the ecological entity.

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82 Plato: *Euthyphro*, 10a.
83 Ziegler, 1980.
84 Lesher, 1975.
85 Regan, 1992.
1.9. Grounding the normative ought.

An investigation of intrinsic value raises fundamental questions of values. By so doing however, we raise the possibility that the issues that remain unresolved and confound the effort to derive an ethic are yet more general than these questions. The questions we must raise are not only the fundamental questions of values and valuing, but of the nature of the ethical enterprise; the questions to be resolved concern not only intrinsic value, but also normative ethics in general. As such, the problem is more general than an exclusively eco-philosophical one: indeed, the title of Regan’s paper alludes to one by Prichard, who in 1912 posed the general question: ‘Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?’ Prichard inquires into the possibility that to the extent that it is tasked with establishing foundations for our sense of obligation to do the right thing, moral philosophy in general has demands placed upon it that it is unable to meet.

Prichard’s is an intuitionist thesis: with Ross he argues that the right and the good are properties known directly by intuition. For the intuitionists, they are properties of actions: right and wrong are about actions. Thus, ‘the sense of obligation to do, or the rightness of, an action of a particular kind is absolutely underivative or immediate.’ For the intuitionists it is our sense of obligation to do the right thing that is our first encounter of the normative ought; as a first encounter, it prompts in us the question of whether we should act on our sense of obligation.

‘We then want to have it proved to us that we ought to do so, ie. to be convinced of this by a process which, as an argument, is different in kind from our original and unreflective appreciation of it.’

Thus, the demand to justify the ought is part of the experience of the ought, and to the extent that it is tasked with providing proof that our sense of obligation is justified, Prichard argues that moral philosophy is unable to meet this demand.

‘If …by moral philosophy is meant the knowledge which would satisfy this demand, there is no such knowledge, and all attempts to attain it are doomed to

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86 Prichard, 2002.
87 Ross, 2002: page 486.
88 Rachels, 2002: page 452.
89 Prichard, 2002: page 471.
90 Prichard, 2002: page 476 (emphasis in original).
failure because they rest on a mistake, the mistake of supposing the possibility of proving what can only be apprehended directly.\textsuperscript{91}

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully consider the thesis of intuitionism and its implications and limitations. Among the many possible responses to the intuitionist thesis is to regard the initial, unreflective experience as separable into a descriptive and a prescriptive component; this distinction is the basis for the thesis of prescriptivism, whereby the normative ought need not be inseparably bound up with the initial experience.\textsuperscript{92} Irrespective of the validity of the thesis of intuitionism, Prichard can be credited with raising the question of what it can mean to ground the normative ought, where such grounding is the theoretical foundation which moral philosophy would provide. Moreover, he can be credited with putting forward the possibility that to do so is an impossible task. Whether or not such a task is possible is a question too large to be considered here, and rather than attempt to settle this question, our focus must be the sense in which it might still be coherent to speak of the ought as it obtains in our relationship with the ecological entity, either in light of, or in spite of Prichard’s conclusion.

In the strongest sense of normativity as entailing obligation, the normative ought that might obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity is one that we may not be able to establish as grounded in a theoretical foundation. Intrinsic value has been the basis for one unsuccessful attempt to establish this ought. Prichard’s conclusion suggests that we cannot necessarily assume that some other model will necessarily succeed. But to allow the possibility that grounding the normative ought is an impossible task does not commit us to the claim that there is no such ought. One possibility is that the ought may obtain in some sense other than in the strongest sense of normativity, nevertheless in a form that is not reducible to mere prudential concerns. Alternatively we might ask whether grounding the ought in a theoretical foundation can ever be a meaningful exercise, and whether it is coherent to speak of a ‘pre-theoretical ought.’ The question would be the extent to which our understanding of the ought depends upon a theoretical foundation. Irrespective of its being grounded

\textsuperscript{91} Prichard, 2002: page 476.
\textsuperscript{92} Hare, 1961.
or not, it remains a valid question as to the sense in which it is coherent to speak of
the ought as it applies to our relationship with the ecological entity.

1.10. Accepting the shaky foundations of moral philosophy.

One response to the potential impossibility of grounding the normative ought is to
grant this possibility and to proceed with the ethical enterprise in spite of it, since it
would be an extreme overreaction to the recognition of the potentially groundless
ought to conclude that we could no longer be moral. While dismissing the whole
undertaking of being ethical is clearly one untenable extreme, it becomes apparent
that seeking to establish unshakeable foundations before we proceed any further is
similarly untenable. Between these untenable extremes is a middle path which
remains open to the possibility that some grounding for the ought might be
established, while not being forestalled by the possibility that there can be none.
Eschewing any claims about what an appropriate morality might be or what
foundations it should have or indeed what might amount to a grounding for the
normative ought, this middle path begins with ordinary moral judgements, these being
the judgements we make as moral agents irrespective of their being grounded in any
theoretical foundation. As such, they are judgements which imply a pre-theoretical
ought. Whether or not this ought might eventually be ‘upgraded’ to the theoretically
grounded ought is a question which remains open.

This middle path is one which Mackie formalises as a theory of ‘moral scepticism.’
Mackie is not being sceptical about morals themselves: he does not doubt our ability
to wield moral notions and to make judgements that imply the normative ought.
Rather, the sense of scepticism he intends concerns moral theory, and the possibility
of finding therein some grounding the normative ought. It is as such a stance of
‘meta-philosophical’ scepticism.

Mackie examines the way in which our ordinary moral judgements ‘involve a claim to
objectivity.’ While any moral judgement must assume that the judgement is much
more than an expression of mere preference and is thus one that could and should

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have general validity, Mackie intends ‘objectivity’ in a stronger sense than this. For Mackie, the claim is an evaluation which assumes and implies the objectivity of the values which it articulates: the values are assumed to be objective in some sense in which they could ideally be verified, such that the judgement thereby validated. To make an ordinary moral judgement is inescapably to make this claim to objectivity: the judgement is the assumption that the evaluation is much more than mere personal preference. The main point of Mackie’s thesis is that such a claim, however, cannot be justified: there are no objective moral values. Thus,

‘Moral scepticism must …take the form of an error theory, admitting that a belief in objective values is built into ordinary thought and language, but holding that this ingrained belief is false.’

For Mackie, we can neither do without our ordinary moral judgements, nor avoid being in error.

Mackie’s thesis is in the first instance a rejection of value realism: he rejects the idea that values are part of the ‘furniture of the world.’ Nevertheless, the differences we perceive between such things as kind and cruel actions, or brave or cowardly behaviour, are real: these are the ‘natural, factual, differences on the basis of which differing values are assigned.’

Thus,

‘The kinds of behaviour to which values and disvalues are ascribed are indeed part of the furniture of the world, and so are the natural, descriptive differences between them; but not perhaps, their differences in value.’

For Mackie, our unavoidable error in our ordinary moral judgements is that we cannot but treat the ascription of value and disvalue as objective, and thus ultimately or ideally verifiable. Our error does not, however, defeat or preclude the possibility of our arriving at a workable ethical system.

‘The denial that there are objective values does not commit one to any particular view about what moral statements mean, and certainly not to the view that they are equivalent to subjective reports.’

For Mackie, moral statements still have meaning, and working out what they mean remains a meaningful exercise.

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For any approach to ethics which takes a non-committal stance to grounding the normative ought in theory, morality is something we can and must work at, though always in light of the possibility that there is no final destination at which we might arrive. To accept this possibility is necessarily to take an approach to the ethical enterprise which is quite the opposite of seeking in the first instance to establish the irrefutable theoretical foundations which would ground the normative ought. Rather than being dependent upon establishing the foundations before even raising the question of how they might be put into practice, the approach of the moral sceptic can only be to begin with ordinary moral judgements. Implicit in these is an apprehension of the normative ought which, as a pre-theoretical ought, is one which may or may not come to be grounded in a theoretical foundation. While Mackie’s thesis is that we are always unavoidably in error when making such judgements, this is a strong thesis to which we need not commit. Without making any commitment on the question of value realism, we may still hold to the view that the pre-theoretical ought implicit in ordinary moral judgements may or may not be one that we can ever fully and finally explicate.

By seeking to establish the theoretical foundations for the normative ought in the first instance, the strong sense of intrinsic value presupposes the value realism which Mackie denies. These approaches assume that intrinsic value is objectively real and discoverable, and that its establishment as such would be its establishment as the basis for the normative ought. But it is clear that the untenability of this particular model of objective value says little about the objectivity of values in general, and to deny that there are any objective values is to assert a strong thesis of about the nature of values. Mackie asserts such a thesis, and while he avoids the equally strong thesis that they are purely subjective, his position cannot stand undefended. Having made a strong claim about the nature of values, he must account for their being part of our ordinary moral judgements. While the theories of intrinsic value make a strong assumption about the objectivity of values which they struggle to justify, Mackie’s is the opposite, but equally strong assumption. To the extent that he is committed to this strong claim, a substantial justification is also demanded of Mackie.
We need not commit to a strong thesis such as Mackie’s. Nevertheless, we can maintain a stance of eschewing claims as to what might amount to a grounding for the normative ought. Consistency does not demand that we make the strong claim that there are no objective values. It is sufficient that we simply begin with our ordinary moral judgements, and to allow for the possibility that the pre-theoretical ought thus apprehended at least has the potential to be established on some theoretical foundation. Thus, the question still remains as to the sense in which it is coherent to speak of the ought as it applies to our relationship with the ecological entity.

1.11. Replacing the normative ought with the natural ought.

Mackie’s error theory begins with a distinction between the ‘natural, descriptive differences’ in terms of which we perceive phenomena, and the ‘values and disvalues’ which they are ascribed. The former he understands to be objectively real as part of ‘the furniture of the world,’ while the latter are not, such that our perception is always of physical things, events and actions which are objectively real and verifiable. Yet Mackie cites as examples actions which we perceive as kind and cruel, or brave and cowardly, interpreting the differences between such actions as the ‘natural, descriptive differences’ subsequently attended by evaluations. For Mackie, the latter are not part of the natural description. But it is far from clear that there is a real distinction here. It is far from clear that the value-neutral natural description which Mackie assumes is a meaningful concept, or indeed whether such a thing is possible. To claim that the only objective descriptions of the world are of physical things and events is to claim that the phenomena we perceive are ultimately reducible to things and events. To distinguish the purely descriptive from the evaluative is a strong thesis, tantamount to the prescriptivist’s distinction between the descriptive and the prescriptive. As with any strong thesis such as this, substantial justification is required.

The objections which challenge Mackie’s strong thesis can be avoided by a weaker, more general thesis which remains uncommitted on the question of grounding the normative ought, while avoiding the substantial assumptions upon which Mackie depends. Thus, we would begin with our ordinary moral judgements without attempting to subdivide them into a descriptive and evaluative component, since it is
far from clear that to do so is valid or meaningful. The emphasis, from the outset, would be very different to a reductionist approach, neither expecting nor seeking to find in specific actions that which is right about them, nor seeking to establish and ground the normative ought. An approach which begins with our ordinary moral judgement while not attempting to reduce or ground or explain them is by no means without precedent in the literature.

In her influential paper of 1958, Anscombe criticised modern moral philosophy by claiming that an undue emphasis is placed upon concepts of moral obligation and duty and the moral sense of ‘ought.’ These, she says, ‘ought to be jettisoned …because they are survivals, or derivatives of survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives.’ Anscombe contends that that ‘earlier conception of ethics’ was a ‘law conception,’ where the law is divine law; ‘concepts of “obligation,” of being bound or required as by a law, …remains though they [have] lost their root.’ Thus, she contends that the situation in modern ethics is ‘the interesting one of the survival of a concept outside the framework of thought that made it a really intelligible one.’ Her claim is that without the divine law-giver, with reference to whom the concepts of moral obligation and duty are meaningful, we are left with the impossible task of grounding these terms in meaning, where that meaning can only have come from their original adjuratory context. Anscombe’s thesis can be read as responding to the problem of grounding the normative ought by offering an explanation in support of Prichard’s contention that to do so is an impossible task. Her argument is consistent with Prichard’s, adding the extra dimension of historical explanation.

Anscombe’s paper is credited as the first modern revival of the Aristotelian emphasis on individual virtue. While her approach is to begin, as with Mackie, with ordinary moral judgements, she contends that the emphasis must be different: rather than rightness of specific actions, she urges that attention should be shifted to virtues and vices, thus to questions about the character of the moral agent. Thus, ‘we should no longer ask whether doing something was “wrong”, passing directly from some

description of an action to this notion.” Rather, “it would be a great improvement if, instead of “morally wrong,” one always named a genus such as “untruthful,” “unchaste,” “unjust.” To name the genus is to describe the action in terms of the character of the agent, where this would be its ‘natural description.’ To do so is to shift the emphasis: now no longer seeking to move from a ‘natural description’ in some value-neutral sense to the evaluation about what is essentially right or wrong about the action, the value-laden description is taken as natural and irreducible. Far from seeking to ground the normative ought, Anscombe recommends that we discard the notion of ‘morally ought,’ which she claims has a ‘delusive appearance of content,’ and simply return to the ‘ordinary ought.’ This latter, she contends, is already there in the value-laden description of actions as virtuous or vicious.

MacIntyre can be understood as being foremost among Anscombe’s contemporary heirs, claiming that our current moral terms derive their meaning from a context of which they have subsequently been deprived. In parallel with Anscombe’s historical argument, MacIntyre claims that we currently possess mere ‘simulacra of morality,’ being ‘the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts of which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived.’ Similarly integrating historical explanation with the philosophical argument, MacIntyre also argues for a revival of notions of virtue. MacIntyre presents a comprehensive account of virtue, thereby answering Anscombe’s call that a revival of the notion of virtue is needed.

It is beyond the scope of this study to undertake a thorough examination of the historical-philosophical accounts offered by Anscombe and MacIntyre. Such a thorough examination might address such questions as whether or not notions of virtue and vice are sufficient to account for our ordinary moral judgements, or whether in these judgement we also wield some notion of the right which we should not attempt to assimilate to notions of virtue and vice. A separate question is the substantial one as to the extent to which the notion of obligation is indeed dependent upon the notion of a divine lawgiver. Notwithstanding these potential objections, we can accept these accounts as offering an explanation as to why grounding the

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104 MacIntyre, 2002.
105 MacIntyre, 2002: page 2.
normative ought is an impossible task. In addition, we can accept them as a call for the revival of notions of virtue. This does not, however, commit us to an exclusive reliance on the notion of virtue: rather, we can simply accept the notion of virtue as an indispensable, and moreover irreducible component of our ordinary moral judgements.

In light of these accounts, we can shift the emphasis away from an exclusive emphasis on the normative ought *per se*, thus away from seeking to ground it or establish it as the sole basis for obligation. To do so is to take a different approach to our ordinary moral judgements, no longer seeking to reduce them or subdivide them or distil anything out of them. We no longer expect that the natural description must lie ‘behind’ these judgements, in such a way that the latter might ultimately be reducible to a descriptive and an evaluative component. By accepting that the value-laden description is the natural description, we emphasise the ordinary moral judgement as having already apprehended the ought. This latter, no longer assumed to be the normative ought which requires a theoretical grounding, is instead taken to be the ordinary ought. Such an ought is one for which theoretical grounding may or may not be a meaningful concept, but which is in any case no longer assumed to be necessary.

1.12. From objectivity to naturalness.

We have yet to explicate what it can mean to find in our ordinary moral judgements an ‘ordinary ought.’ In particular, we need to explicate how such an ought might obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity. While Anscombe offers reasons as to why a revival of notions of virtue might circumvent the need to provide a theoretical foundation for the normative ought, hers is primarily a historical explanation which does not extend to articulating the account of virtue she recommends. While MacIntyre does provide such an account, we cannot necessarily assume that an account of virtue will resolve the question of how the ought might obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity.\(^\text{106}\) we cannot assume that it has been established that an ecological ethic is necessarily a virtue ethics.\(^\text{107}\) Nor can we assume that a revival of notions of virtue can be the only alternative to seeking

\(^{106}\) MacIntyres’s account is considered in Chapter Two of this study.  
\(^{107}\) This question is considered in Chapter Four of this study.
theoretical foundations for the normative ought. While Anscombe recommends that moral philosophy focus on such terms as untruthful and unjust, it is not clear how such evaluations might obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity. Thus, rather than assuming the validity of virtue approaches at the outset, our approach must be a more general one which begins with our ordinary moral judgements.

An ordinary moral judgement is an evaluation in which we might find an ‘ordinary ought.’ This latter notion we might understand in a broad sense, as an evaluation of a situation or person or their action. Such an evaluation may be prescriptive, thereby implying an ought, perhaps also implying some sense of obligation. Notions of right or wrong, of good or bad, and of the prescriptive and of obligation, may all be present in our ordinary moral judgement. The key point is that this should not present us with a problem: we need not seek to determine how these various facets of our judgement interrelate by providing them with some theoretical grounding. Nor need we assume that there should be some natural description of the situation or action which is purely descriptive, and which is the subject of our evaluation, an ‘is’ to which the ought is somehow attached. That is, we need not seek to explain away the evaluation which is our ordinary moral judgement. We need not enter into the refractory question of ‘the deduction of values from facts, or the related question of defining ethical words in nonethical terms.’ By eschewing any such reduction, these perennial questions of moral philosophy questions simply do not arise.

Prior to the spurious problem of the deduction of values from facts is the distinction between them, and Williams raises the question of how such a distinction comes about. His point is that it is not a valid assumption that any such distinction is simply there already in our ordinary moral judgements or indeed in our moral language: he contends that the problem arises because ‘theorists have brought the fact-value distinction to language rather than finding it revealed there.’ He contends, moreover, what we in fact find revealed in language are ‘thick’ ethical notions, being those which ‘seem to express a union of fact and value,’ whereby ‘their application usually involves a certain valuation of the situation, of persons or actions.’ Their application is in our ordinary moral judgements, and the ‘certain valuation’ which

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108 Williams, 1985: page 121.
109 Williams, 1985: page 129.
occurs therein is something we can recognise as Anscombe’s ‘ordinary ought.’ Thus, we can recognise Williams as concurring to some extent with Anscombe.

The evaluations which Williams intends are much more general than the purely prescriptive, as indeed Anscombe’s notion of the ought is much more than prescriptive. While such evaluations ‘usually (though not necessarily directly) provide reasons for action,’\textsuperscript{110} there is for Williams no requirement that they do so. Evaluation is for Williams embedded in the thick ethical term, and embedded therein may be different senses of evaluation. Among these may be some which provide only minimal reasons for acting, such that any ought implied therein is in a sense much weaker than that which entails obligation. Williams’ notion of thick ethical terms thus allows for a broader definition of the evaluative than the purely prescriptive, and a broader sense of the ought than that which entails obligation.

Williams’ thick ethical terms stand in direct contrast to Mackie’s, which latter simply assume that there exists the ‘natural, descriptive differences’ which are ascribed ‘values and disvalues.’ Refuting any notion of anything that lies behind our ordinary moral judgements, or indeed the need for any such metaphysical presuppositions, we accept instead that the value-laden description is the natural description. The question of objectivity does not arise: rather than objectivity, it is naturalness that is given priority. Eschewing any metaphysical assertions, ‘the only starting point left is ethical experience itself.’\textsuperscript{111}

1.13. von Neurath’s ship.

Ethics which begins with ethical experience begins with our ordinary moral judgements, thus with an investigation of the way that evaluative and normative terms are wielded by rational agents. Of interest is not the way that they should be wielded, but the way they are in fact. To raise the question of the way that such terms should be wielded is to raise the issue of establishing normativity and thus of foundations. Avoiding these spurious questions, our task is the clarificatory explication of the actual use of ethical and evaluative terms, these being the thick terms in which

\textsuperscript{110} Williams, 1985: pp. 129-130.
\textsuperscript{111} Williams, 1985: page 93.
evaluation is embedded. Yet while we are concerned primarily with their actual use, our task is not merely an anthropological survey. We are not passive or disinterested observers, and to undertake a clarificatory explication is to undertake reflection upon our use of ethical terms, and the understanding of ourselves embedded therein.

Our ethical task is one of reflection, however it is one that is undertaken without the structured priorities of a theoretical foundation. To dispense with ethical theory is not to be cast adrift, left without the resources to modify, reassess or discard our ethical terms. Thus,

‘It is quite wrong to think that the only alternative to ethical theory is to refuse reflection and to remain in unreflective prejudice. Theory and prejudice are not the only possibilities for an intelligent agent, or for philosophy.’

Reflection does not require theory. We begin with ethical experience, and remain there; we do not seek to impose any general unifying principles upon it, nor to derive them.

We need to understand ethical reflection as something other than the Rawlsian conception in which latter we would work towards the attainment of reflective equilibrium. Rawlsian reflection is a process of moving step by step towards a stance in which our considered intuitions are fully in harmony with our considered principles. These latter we would derive from theory, but in the absence of any such theory, reflection must proceed by some other model. General principles would be those with reference to which we would justify an evaluation as rational, and as such, they constitute the foundation we now eschew. For Williams, the alternative is a less structured approach:

‘The foundationalist enterprise, of resting the structure of knowledge on some favoured class of statements, has now generally been replaced by a holistic type of model, in which some beliefs can be questioned, justified, or adjusted while others are kept constant, but there is no process by which they can all be questioned at once, or all justified in terms of (almost) nothing.’

In von Neurath’s image,

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112 Williams, 1985: page 112.
113 Rawls, 1971.
115 Williams, 1985: page 113.
‘We are like sailors who must rebuild their ship on the open sea, never able to dismantle it in dry-dock and to reconstruct it there out of the best materials.’

In the image of von Neurath’s ship, the ethical enterprise is something we conceive of as fundamentally different to the foundationalist enterprise. The distinction can be viewed as fundamental, indeed meta-ethical to the extent that it concerns the nature of moral judgement. The distinction is between two alternative approaches to the task of moral philosophy: a foundationalist approach which we might loosely describe as the Enlightenment approach, and a non-foundationalist approach which we might loosely describe as neo-Aristotelian. For Williams the reconceived ethical enterprise is represented by a ‘linguistic turn,’ while for Taylor it is an Aristotelian meta-ethics.

To describe our reconceived approach to ethics as Aristotelian might imply an exclusive focus on aretaic notions of virtue, however this is not what is intended. Our approach must be broader than this: we cannot at this stage assume that the outcome of our inquiry will be an environmental virtue ethics. Indeed, Taylor does not intend that the notion of an Aristotelian meta-ethics be taken to mean an exclusive focus on virtue. Rather, he intends it to describe an alternative to the approach in which prescriptive principles are founded procedurally. To the extent that it emphasises the actual use of ethical terms, being the thick ethical terms in which evaluation is embedded but for which there is no requirement to use standardised or sanctioned terms, we might describe this approach as colloquial. But this would discount the central importance of reflection, suggesting that ethics is merely a _laissez faire_ undertaking. To avoid these connotations, the non-foundationalist approach can simply be called just that, thus defined negatively in such a way as to leave it an open question as to the shape that such an approach might take.

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117 Williams, 1985: Chapter 7.

In light of the distinction between the foundationalist and non-foundationalist approaches to moral philosophy, the question of an ecological ethic can be reconsidered. In particular, we need to understand what it might mean to take the non-foundationalist approach to a reconsideration of our initial question. To discredit the foundationalist approach to the question does not entail that we cannot be ethical in our relationship with the ecological entity: theory and unreflective prejudice are not the only alternatives. Through some process of reflection we might come to realise a relationship with the ecological entity that is less exploitative or destructive, however this will not be the attainment of Rawlsian reflective equilibrium. We are no longer concerned with the question of what an appropriate ethics might be. Rather, our concern is to explicate the evaluations we find implicit and embedded in our use of thick ethical terms, wherein we might find the basis for our being ethical in our relationship with the ecological entity.

If there exists the need for and the possibility of a redintegration of our relationship with the ecological entity, then such an undertaking can only be the reflective one that begins with our ethical experience. It can be of no avail to claim that our ethics should be something other than what it is, such that we might undertake to restore it to what it ‘should be,’ for instance by

‘opening up ethics, …by making the human/other species distinction less central to our ethical thinking, and decentering the human and the human-like in vocabularies and conceptions of ethics.’

This common refrain in contemporary eco-philosophical work aims to supplant anthropocentric ethics with eco-centric ethics, viewing the former as analogous to such biases as racism and sexism. But as Williams observes, this analogy is simply incorrect: the bias of the latter is to treat the privileged (white or male) perspective as ineliminable from ethical reflection. To regard ethics as human-centred is no such bias, since the human perspective is indeed ineliminable from ethical reflection. ‘Our arguments have to be grounded in a human point of view; they cannot be grounded in a point of view that is no-one’s point of view at all.’

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120 Williams, 1985: page 119.
our human viewpoint, and it does so by beginning with our (human) ethical experience.

To begin with ethical experience must be to seek to understand our (human-centred) ethics for what it is, rather than to envisage its replacement with an ethic newly derived from some eco-centric foundational principles. As Passmore observes:

‘A morality, [like] a religion, is not … the sort of thing one can simply conjure up. It can only grow out of existing attitudes of mind, as an extension or development of them, just because, unlike a speculative hypothesis, it is pointless unless it actually governs man’s conduct.’

Existing attitudes are those we find implicit in our ethical terms, in which evaluation is embedded. Reflection upon these is the only means by which attitudes may change, and the only vehicle by which our relationship with the ecological entity might move towards redintegration. Rather than a question of what the foundational ethical principles should be, the question of our being ethical in our relationship with the ecological entity can only be that of how this might obtain in our everyday use of thick evaluative terms. Rather than seeking to establish the need for, or the possibility of some special or idealised relationship with the ecological entity, our question is whether there might be an ethical dimension to our everyday relationship with that entity.

The possibility we need to consider is that by more clearly understanding our use of thick value-laden terms, we might come to understand our relationship with the ecological entity as having an ethical dimension which is implicit in those terms. As examples of such terms, Williams cites ‘treachery and promise and brutality and courage.’ But Williams’ examples are all virtue terms, and it is not immediately clear how these might obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity. We cannot simply conclude that we have only virtue terms at our disposal and that an ecological ethic can only be a virtue ethic. The non-foundationalist approach must have at least the potential to accommodate value-laden terms other than notions of human virtue. But our value-laden terms do not come labelled as such: there is no foreordained list of such terms. Nor can there be any criterion by which we might determine whether

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121 Passmore, 1974: page 111.
some term is value-laden or not: to assume that there must be such a criterion is simply to reiterate the error of intrinsic value, assuming that some particular value or set of values is there to be found in the terms thus laden. Our task is to understand the evaluation that is our use of these terms, however this task cannot be one of simply analysing terms: the ethical dimension of our interrelationships is the use of our entire vocabulary of evaluative terms, and this is not reducible to analysing individual terms.

While we may speak of a vocabulary of value-laden terms, our task is not that of the linguist or the anthropologist: we are not detached observers, monitoring the use of terms from some value-neutral meta-perspective. Much less is our task that of the lexicographer, isolating terms in order to understand them. Rather, our task is one of reflection upon the evaluations that are ours, where such reflection is itself evaluation. Our ethical task is one of immanent reflection, with its aim being greater fluency in the language of evaluation that is ours. But we must also allow for a re-evaluation of existing practices, thus for some critical leverage in normative matters. What is called for is some form of immanent reflection upon those terms that does not become mired in tradition or prejudice, or individual or cultural bias. We therefore need to allow that there need be no natural limit to immanent reflection: it need never assume that it has hit bedrock, instead proceeding on the assumption that its standing is only ever tentative.¹²²

1.15. Encountering and evaluating the ecological entity.

The possibility of there being an ethical dimension to our relationship with the ecological entity turns on the question of how we value it. But this is a very broad question: there is no foreordained set of terms in which genuinely ethical evaluation is embedded, and nor is there any one way in which the ecological entity is valued. It is inevitable that different individuals will value it differently: while some may do so more reflectively than others, this need not be the only difference. It cannot be assumed that there is an appropriate or correct way of valuing it: to do so would be to imply that there exists some set of values, there to be discovered, which we might

¹²² This is in contrast to the Deep Ecology approach, which aims to arrive at what it calls ‘ultimate norms.’ We need not assume that any such thing could ever be arrived at. Deep Ecology is discussed in Chapter Four.
ideally come to hold. While there may indeed be historical and cultural constellations of values and patterns of valuing, our task is not that of the historian or the anthropologist. Rather than merely describing or explaining patterns of valuing, our task must be something prior. Our prior task is the reflective one of understanding what it is to value the ecological entity. This task involves a shift in emphasis: from value as a noun, to value as a verb.

The ecological entity is in the first instance not so much a valuable entity as a valued entity: rather than its being valuable in some particular way or for some particular reason, it is the prior fact of its being valued that we need to understand. While there can be no one true and correct way of valuing it, this does not preclude the possibility of understanding the process of valuing in a way that is general or indeed universal. It is our common capacity for valuing the ecological entity which would underlie the possibility of our being ethical towards it, and among the many ways in which we value the entity would be the basis for our being ethical towards it. Thus, our valuing the ecological entity is necessary for our being ethical towards it, but not sufficient. Prior to the possibility of our being ethical towards it is the fact that we value it.

Routley’s ‘last person’ thought experiment simplifies our encounter with the ecological entity, throwing into relief the prior fact of our valuing it. Imagining ‘the collapse of the world system’$^{123}$ as an apocalyptic event of which there is only one human survivor, Routley imagines that this last remaining person then sets about the wanton destruction of the surrounding biota. While his actions can be of no harm or offence to anyone, it is intuitively apparent they are reprehensible nevertheless. Our pre-philosophical intuition is that something valuable is being destroyed, in spite of the fact that there are no human valuers. While his actions are undeniably wrong, it is not clear that we can necessarily conceive of either their inherent viciousness, or the vices of the last person, in a way that is completely in isolation of other human valuers. Routley’s thought experiment is intended to eliminate the question of whether values must be understood in relation to other human valuers, thus demonstrating that we find there to be something inherently or naturally wrong about

$^{123}$ Sylvan (Routley), 1993: page 16.
the gratuitous destruction of the ecological entity, and in a way that can be conceived independently of other human valuers.

Routley’s last person thought experiment is intended to reduce our encounter with the ecological entity to the simplest case in which there are no other valuers, and in which all possibilities for ascribing it instrumental value have been eliminated. As such, it has been interpreted as an argument for the intrinsic value of the ecological entity.\textsuperscript{124, 125, 126, 127} Thus, it has been interpreted as showing that we have a non-instrumental notion of the value of the ecological entity, and that this must be intrinsic value. But this interpretation is too quick: we have already seen that a contrast between instrumental and intrinsic value is a false contrast. While the thought experiment illustrates our intuition that something valuable is being destroyed, it does not demonstrate that the ecological entity must possess some particular value which any sufficiently rational subject could and should be expected to perceive. Moreover, to claim that this particular value is one which entails a substantial sense of the ought is, as we have seen, fraught with circularity.

To read the last person thought experiment as isolating the ecological entity and its intrinsic value (in the strong sense) is an overly reductive interpretation. Even in this endmost case in which there can be no instrumental valuing, we do not perceive the ecological entity in isolation. Rather, we perceive a situation in which the ecological entity is implicated, and in which an ought obtains. The thought experiment shows that we are unlikely to perceive the act of destruction with indifference: our response to the gratuitous act of destruction is an evaluation. However, it can only be a spurious undertaking to seek to reduce this to a ‘natural’ description of the entity, and to identify the value that is being violated in the act of destruction. With Williams, we can see that the value-laden description is the natural description, a description which is irreducible.

\textsuperscript{125} Rolston, 1982: pp. 149-150.  
\textsuperscript{127} Carter argues that the last person thought experiment is consistent with a projectivist account of the intrinsic value of the ecological entity. Carter, 2004.
We can interpret the last person thought experiment as showing that our encounter with the ecological entity is never an encounter with a value-free entity. Even when all possibility of instrumental valuing has been removed from the equation, an evaluation, and thus some sense of the ought, still obtains. Our valuing the ecological entity is inevitably, and perhaps inherently, part of our encounter with it. If we are to understand our relationship with the entity as having an ethical dimension, then we must look to our encounter with the entity: only therein might we find the evaluation which is the basis for our being ethical towards it.

1.16. The significance of the ecological entity.

Neatly simplifying our encounter with the ecological entity, Routley’s experiment with its gratuitous destruction throws the prior fact of our valuing it into relief. To begin with our ethical experience is to begin with the evaluation which is inherently part of our encounter with the ecological entity. But this evaluation obtains in many and various ways, not all of which may be immediately apparent as such. In order to describe the encounter in such a way as to accommodate all possible forms of evaluation, we can postulate a generic term which encapsulates this prior fact of valuing while avoiding the error of appealing to anything intrinsic to the ecological entity. Such a term would be one that would be equally valid in all cases of valuing, in all the many forms of evaluation embedded in the many and various value-laden terms.

In order to describe the ecological entity as one that is valued \textit{per se} without making any inference as to what sort of evaluation this might be, we can say that the ecological entity is \textit{significant}. A thing is significant to the extent that it is invested with value, while to value it is to invest it with significance of some sort. Its significance is that it is valued, and any attempt to define its significance in isolation of our valuing it, or as any sort of reason behind our valuing it, is eschewed. The significance of the ecological entity is a term which will facilitate our task of immanent reflection upon the evaluations we express through our thick value-laden terms. The significance of the ecological entity is a notion which is undetermined, and therein lies its usefulness: as a protean notion, it remains, as it must, an open question as to how this might obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity.
2. Articulating the significance of the ecological entity.

2.1. Introduction.

Taking up the point that ethics begins with our ethical experience, this chapter explores the question of how, or indeed whether, any moral evaluation might arise within our everyday practices of valuing as we interact with the ecological entity. The basis of a phenomenological approach to investigating our experience of valuing the ecological entity is outlined, an approach which focuses on the key notion of the significance of the ecological entity. Seeking to understand our experience of valuing the ecological entity as integrally part of our broader practices of valuing, MacIntyre’s account of practices is explored, wherein valuing must be understood as integrally part of the practice, and practices must be understood in terms of self-reflective participation. While it is MacIntyre’s account which introduces the notion of the self as the key to understanding valuing, Taylor’s account of the self is endorsed as offering considerable advantage over MacIntyre’s. It is by following Taylor’s account that we begin to understand the self as internally, and indeed constitutively related to its goods and values.

2.2. The irreducible richness of significance.

Our redefined task is to articulate the significance of the ecological entity (the SEE). To do so is to explicate the fact of its being valued: its significance is that it is invested with value. It is so invested in many and various ways, and significance is therefore not something we can reduce to a definition. Nor should we seek to do so: the valuing in which its significance consists is not something we should seek to understand as intrinsic to the ecological entity, but instead as inherently part of our encounter with it. To encounter the ecological entity is to value it, and this we do in many and various ways, such that our encounter with the ecological entity is never an encounter with a value-free entity but is instead always an encounter with an entity that is significant in some way. At its most rudimentary level, our evaluation may be
predominantly instrumental, yet even then we encounter the entity as having some significance: its significance is its usefulness to us in our attaining some end or purpose. To the extent that we must interact with the ecological entity, it must have some significance for us, and our task is to explicate how this is so.

As we have seen, potentially among the many ways in which we value the ecological entity is evaluation which would be the basis for our behaving ethically towards it. We have also seen that our ethical task is one of immanent reflection upon the evaluations we express through our thick value-laden terms, where such reflection is itself evaluation, its aim being greater fluency in the language of evaluation that is ours. Our ethical task, most generally stated, is therefore one of articulation: it is to articulate the renewed understanding in which this greater fluency consists. Potentially part of this overall task of being ethical is to articulate the significance of the ecological entity.

Our task is to articulate the significance of the ecological entity (the ‘SEE’) as we encounter it. That is, this task should be regarded as non-reducible: we should not assume that this task is purely conceptual, nor that it can necessarily be reduced to the conceptual. Rather, we must allow for the possibility that there may be a sense of articulation which is non-conceptual. Such a sense of articulation might be understood as not only non-conceptual, but pre-conceptual: that is, as something which is possible only for beings with the capacity for conceptual, and ultimately philosophical, articulation. There is therefore some relation between these different forms of articulation, a relation we have yet to establish. For the time being, the key point is that our articulating the SEE as we encounter it is our regarding it as a question to which there can be no immediate or platitudinous answer.

In undertaking our task of articulating the SEE, we cannot ignore the non-conceptual forms of articulation and proceed directly to a philosophical articulation. To this end, the term is left deliberately undefined. The task of articulation is not the lexicographical one of explicating the individual terms in which our evaluations are embedded, nor the anthropological or sociological one of merely describing the patterns of their use. Articulating the SEE must mean more than mere description, more than merely relating experience: it is a task which must remain open to the non-
conceptual. This allows for the possibility that the SEE might be an inchoate notion that we might gesture towards or possibly hint at in poetry. Being an inchoate notion, we must allow for the possibility that it has some depth that we are as yet without the conceptual resources to articulate. By leaving the SEE undefined, this is an open possibility on which we do not foreclose.

Articulating the SEE as we encounter it entails our taking a stance which is never a value-neutral meta-perspective, being instead a reflection upon evaluation which is itself evaluation. The significance of the ecological entity is that we value it, and to the extent that it is itself evaluation, articulating the SEE is a reflexive process, and as such a process without end. This would suggest that the SEE is something we may never come to understand finally or definitively, being instead a notion with an irreducible richness or depth. Thus, our expressing it would be through thick value-laden terms with which there is the potential for ever greater fluency. Integrally part of this potential for greater fluency is the possibility that we might articulate the SEE in such a way that we can understand ourselves as being ethical towards the ecological entity.

The notion of the SEE would appear to be somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, our being affronted by the gratuitous destruction of the ecological entity suggests an immediate apprehension of its significance. On the other hand, the SEE seems to be something that we may not yet be able to fully grasp or articulate, indeed being something we may never completely articulate. This paradox prompts the question of whether there may be a gap between the immediate apprehension or appreciation of the SEE and its articulation. Such a gap would be between a pre-articulate affective dimension of the SEE, and the conceptual articulation thereof. It is bridging this gap that has classically been the task of the poet. However, while our ethical task, as a task of articulation, must accommodate the possibility of this gap, this is not to suggest that this task is one of writing poetry. We need not be the poet in order to be ethical, and nor can we depend upon the poets to do the work of articulation on our behalf. Articulation is something we must understand in a more general sense than this, such that it is our task as moral agents, a task which is immanently our own and indeed one which we cannot avoid. If we are to understand our relationship with the
ecological entity as having an ethical dimension, then we must account for the SEE as immanently part of this task of articulation.

2.3. Towards a moral phenomenology.

While the general task of articulation, which is the task of being ethical, is one which we cannot avoid, this does not entail that articulating the SEE is necessarily part of that task. We have not established that we must be ethical with respect to the ecological entity. Nor have we established that among the many ways in which we might understand the SEE, one such will necessarily be the basis for our being ethical. While evaluation is inherently part of our encounter with the ecological entity, this is necessary for our being ethical, but not sufficient: we may value the ecological entity in many ways, many of which are predominantly instrumental, and as such far from anything we could regard as ethical.

In order to answer the question of whether we might find some basis for our being ethical towards the ecological entity, we must undertake the task of articulating the SEE as we encounter it. Therein lies the possibility that our articulation of the SEE may be something non-conceptual, being instead an articulation through some practice or institution. Such a practice might be anything from horticulture to religious ritual. As moral agents who value the ecological entity and thereby perceive it to have some significance, our many and various practical dealings with it are many and various means of articulating its significance. Among these many possibilities for valuing the ecological entity, those evaluations which might be the basis for our being ethical are not foreordained or demarcated as such. And as Chapter One has shown, it can make no sense to decide in advance what these evaluations should be. Rather, we must look to our experience of valuing the ecological entity as we encounter it, remaining open to the possibility that the basis for our being ethical might be found therein.

As moral agents who routinely make ordinary moral judgements, our ethical task is pre-philosophical, and to the extent that articulating the SEE is integrally part of this task, it is a pre-philosophical task of articulation. But our task of articulation is also philosophical: subsequent to the SEE being articulated in practice as the basis for our
being ethical, our philosophical task is to articulate its having been so articulated. Thus, we must distinguish between the pre-philosophical and the philosophical, such that the distinction is between two facets of a twofold task of articulation.

Central to this twofold task, common to both facets and pivotal to the distinction between them, is the notion of the SEE. Philosophically, the SEE is a protean notion, being the means to describe our investing the ecological entity with value as we do so in our many and various dealings with it. Pre-philosophically, the SEE is always to some degree inchoate, being a significance with which we invest the ecological entity, while not necessarily being able to fully conceptualise or articulate. It is both of these dimensions of the SEE, its being protean and its being to some degree inchoate, that renders the notion a productive one.

While the SEE can be regarded as a notion that is protean and to some extent inchoate, it is a separate but essential point that it must also remain indeterminate. That is, we should not seek to pin it down in a rigorous philosophical definition. Rather, we must allow it to remain an open question as to how the SEE obtains in our dealings with the ecological entity, and whether this can be the basis for our being ethical. But its remaining indeterminate does not preclude our grasping it philosophically: although it will not admit of reductive definition or analysis, we can grasp the notion philosophically through reflection on, and articulation of the many and various ways in which our valuing the ecological entity is expressed through our many and various (pre-philosophical) dealings with it. The essential point that the SEE remain indeterminate is, moreover, a methodological point: it defines our method as phenomenological. The method of phenomenology can be negatively defined as the eschewal of foundational assertions, or any such attempt to establish grounding or explanation.129 While there is a great deal more to be said about phenomenology, this minimal, negative definition is sufficient for our investigation to get underway.

Eschewing any attempt to delimit or define the indeterminate and protean notion of the SEE, a phenomenological investigation begins with our experience of it. Thus, our philosophical task of phenomenology is to articulate the SEE as we encounter it.

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128 This is Heidegger’s distinction between the existential (das Existenzial) and the existentiell (das Existenzielle). Being and Time: page 33.
129 This is consistent with Heidegger’s conception of phenomenology as purely methodological. Being and Time: page 50.
pre-philosophically. This encounter, however, is never with the SEE per se, but with the ecological entity in our many and various dealings with it. This encounter, as we have seen, is never with a value-free entity: therein the SEE is our valuing the ecological entity, and therein the SEE is pre-philosophically articulated. Phenomenology therefore brings together the various senses of articulation: this may be philosophical or pre-philosophical, the latter conceptual or pre-conceptual. It is our ordinary experience of the SEE, rather than any definition, that is our concern, and it is only in our experience of valuing the ecological entity that this is to be found. A phenomenological investigation of the SEE therefore begins with the more general inquiry into our practices of valuing.

2.4. Practices, values, and the practice of valuing.

To the extent that it is instantiated in shared practices, valuing is something we need to understand in terms of practices, while not necessarily being reducible to explanation in terms of the practice. Pre-philosophically, it is through our practices and institutions that we come to know our values. While valuing must have both individual and shared aspects, it is a phenomenon which is elusive to reductive explanation in terms of either aspect. Nor should we seek any such reductive explanation, this being inconsistent with the method of phenomenology. We must conclude that an explication of valuing cannot be separated from an explication of the practices in which it is instantiated.

The idea that we must understand valuing in terms of practices without, however, reductively explaining the former in terms of the latter has inspired a contemporary account of values. Raz postulates that values emerge through practices, but do not remain dependent upon the consuetude of the practice. The corollary is that we may still recognise values that pertain to practices that we no longer recognise. A central claim in Raz’s thesis is that while values emerge through social practices, this does not entail that values will thenceforth pertain only to the practice through which they have emerged. Thus, ‘once a value comes into being, it bears on everything, without

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restriction." Social dependence is therefore intended to refer to the initial emergence of a value but not its continuing aptness or consonance, thereby articulating ‘an asymmetry between [a value’s] initial emergence and its continued existence.’

Raz’s account of the social dependence of values gives central importance to a distinction between general values and more specific values. Raz proposes a two-stage social dependence thesis: the ‘special social dependence thesis’ and the ‘(general) social dependence thesis’. Thus, ‘some values exist only if there are (or were) social practices sustaining them’ (the special thesis), while ‘with some exceptions, all values depend upon social practices either by being subject to the special thesis or through their dependence on values that are subject to the special thesis.’ Raz cites as examples of practices such things as opera, intimate friendship, marriage, political structures, social relations, law. Practices as such can be specific or very general, and Raz’s two-stage thesis allows for very general values to be dependent upon a more specific value (or constellation thereof) that emerges through specific social practices. Ultimately, the thesis allows for universal human values to emerge through their dependence upon the socially more specific values that emerge through social practices.

Raz’s thesis can be understood as a supervenience thesis: values are supervenient upon practices to the extent that it is through a certain practice or set of practices that values emerge or are brought into being, while a different set of practices might bring into being a set of values that is the same or similar. The thesis aims to accommodate the fact that values articulated in Greek tragedy remain part of our vocabulary: despite the supervenience of the value on the practice, the desuetude of the practice does not entail the obsolescence of its concomitant set of values. Raz thus offers an explanation of values as real features of the world, being actual

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134 Supervenience is a word not used by Raz, but can be read into his statement on page 55 that ‘practices underdetermine the nature of the values they sustain.’ While he uses the notion of emergence, it is used in a loose sense that does not acknowledge its metaphysical implications. For the purposes of this study, the notion of supervenience is understood as closely allied to the notion of emergence and is seen as one that is necessary for a full explication of Raz’s account.
phenomena, even though their existence depends upon the existence of actual valuing beings.

Raz’s thesis is soon seen to be fraught with contention. One main objection must be its inherent conservatism: it cannot account for the internal re-evaluation of practices. Such re-evaluation is simply not accommodated by the thesis of practice-dependent values, which can nonetheless persist beyond the practice in which they originally arose. Thus, the practice would need to have varied already for the values that inform the re-evaluation to have emerged, in which case the critical reflection on the practice, which is its re-evaluation, must already have occurred. The only alternative is that critical reflection on the practice is in light of an evaluation that pertains to that practice, but which has not emerged from it. This latter, however, is inconsistent with Raz’s model of values.

Raz anticipates the conservatism objection but his response begs the question. Acknowledging that ‘the existence of a sustaining practice is merely a necessary, not sufficient condition’ for the emergence of values, he states that critical reflection is accommodated since the thesis ‘allows one full recourse to the whole of one’s conceptual armoury, information, and powers of argumentation’ in reflecting upon practices.\(^{135}\) The circularity of Raz’s account is that it must appeal to some prior ground or source of critical reflection, which latter can only be the values themselves, and Raz’s account therefore presupposes the very thing it is intended to explain.

Avoiding any attempt to explain values as practice-dependent, a phenomenological approach begins with the observation that a practice is a very vague notion, and therefore with the acknowledgement that a reductive explanation is unlikely to succeed. Any number of activities might count as a practice, from the most mundane everyday tasks to the highly aesthetic and culturally specific, the notion being so loose as to accommodate almost any interpretation. This much is acknowledged by Taylor, who defines practice as ‘something extremely vague and general: more or less any stable configuration of shared activity, whose shape is defined by a certain pattern of

\(^{135}\) Raz, 2003: page 25.
dos and don’ts. For Taylor, activities that may count as practices may include ‘the way we discipline our children, greet each other in the street, determine group decisions through voting in elections, and exchange things through markets.’ A notion as vague as this appropriately defeats reductive definition, however it does not offer much towards an articulation of how it is that valuing is inherently part of these practices.


MacIntyre offers a more substantial definition of practices in which the realisation of goods and values is internal to the practice. Thus, a practice is ‘any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity.’

MacIntyre’s notion of a practice is a richer notion but is also a more specific formulation, being based upon the substantial notions of standards of excellence and internal goods. These interrelated notions represent two facets of the acquisition and development of skill, which latter is for MacIntyre essential to the notion of practice.

Standards of excellence are a pivotal notion in MacIntyre’s account of practice. Indeed, these are partially definitive of the practice: the practice is the instantiation of these standards, and to participate in the practice is to aspire to their attainment. An understanding of practice in terms of standards of excellence is thus pre-philosophical as well as philosophical. MacIntyre understands practices as much more than static patterns of action, and participation as much more than anything that can be unreflective or habitual. While we may participate in innumerably many activities without necessarily understanding ourselves as aspiring to any such standards, such activities do not qualify as practices. Reflection is irreducibly part of participation in practice, being immanently part of aspiring to the standards of excellence, and MacIntyre’s definition of practice excludes activity that can be understood without reference to standards of excellence or reflective participation. Thus, bricklaying and

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planting turnips are not practices while architecture and farming are. Much more than merely a stable configuration of shared activity, a practice is for MacIntyre inherently dynamic. Its dynamism is that the standards of excellence are continually being redefined by the practitioners who attain mastery of the practice, such that the standards are inherently fluid and evolving and the practice is continually being reinvented from within.

Closely related to his notion of standards of excellence is MacIntyre’s key notion of internal goods, which are realised through aspiring to the standards of excellence of the practice in question. The goods internal to a practice are those that cannot be held in any way but by participating in a practice of the kind in question, and these goods are defined in contrast to the external goods such as fame and fortune that may also ensue from the attainment of excellence in a practice. While external goods are ‘always some individual’s property and possession’ held to the exclusion of others, internal goods are held in common, to the benefit of all who participate in or otherwise recognise the practice as one that is relevant to their lives. MacIntyre defines such goods as internal to a practice for two reasons: firstly because they can be specified only in terms of, and by means of examples from, practices of the particular kind in question, and secondly because they ‘can only be identified and recognised by the experience of participating in the practice in question.’ Thus, internal goods are held by all who recognise a certain practice, but realised only by those whose participation in the practice approaches the standards of excellence.

MacIntyre’s account of practices has a significant advantage over a reductive explanatory account such as Raz’s: it recognises that a substantive account of the participant must be given. Participation in MacIntyre’s practices is never merely passive, and the participant is much more than the unreflective, passive or indeed hapless participant. While Raz’s practices might accommodate some such quasi-communitarian agent, MacIntyre’s practices demand a much more dynamic conception of the participant, as one that is essentially reflective. MacIntyre’s participant is motivated by the standards of excellence, seeking to grow through the acquisition and mastery of skill. By aspiring to attain the standards of excellence, and

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137 MacIntyre, 2002: page 190.
138 MacIntyre, 2002: page 190.
being at the same time judged against them, the practitioner realises the internal goods of the practice. Thus, a dynamic relationship between the practice and the participant obtains: the evolution and development of both the practice and the participant is brought about by the latter’s reflective participation.

One possible objection to the account of standards of excellence is that ‘there are standards of excellence for very bad things: a good assassin is cool, methodical, careful and ruthless.’\(^{140}\) Similarly, a certain level of reflective skill must surely have been involved in the practice of foot-binding and there must also have been standards of excellence that pertained to that practice. This would seem to present the challenge to MacIntyre’s account of practices that its veracity might be restricted to those practices for which the excellences purely aesthetic, being those that pertain to artistic endeavour. However, according to MacIntyre’s definition of a practice, assassination and foot-binding are not practices. This is because a practice is defined in such a way that participating in the practice entails ‘that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.’\(^{141}\) Such a definition excludes those activities that intentionally bring harm.

Appealing to ‘human conceptions of the ends and goods involved,’ MacIntyre’s response to the objection might appear to beg the question, seeming to presuppose that practices are arbitrarily defined as a subset of the activities that essentially involve reflective skill. Far from begging the question, however, it can be seen to intimate the significant point that reflection is a substantial notion, and must be understood as such. It must be understood in contrast to the reflection involved in skilful but harmful practice,\(^ {142}\) which latter can be of only very limited compass or depth, being only a superficial reflection that fully examines neither the involvement of the agent nor the consequences of its actions. The significant point that emerges is that reflection in a substantial sense is self-reflection, which is much more than honing one’s skills towards the attainment of an end, altruistic or otherwise. It is self-reflection that is essential to the attainment and mastery of skill as well as the realisation of the internal goods of the practice, and understanding this requires that

\(^{140}\) Korsgaard, 2003: page 69.

\(^{141}\) MacIntyre, 2002: page 187.

\(^{142}\) (sensu lacto).
we account for the self in a substantial way. MacIntyre’s notion of practice introduces the crucial notion of the self, and therein lies its significant advantage over any reductively explanatory account.

2.6. Self-reflection and the good of the whole life.

MacIntyre’s account demonstrates the irreducible interconnectedness of the notions of practices, goods and values, and the self. Each of these notions is presented in such a way that it is meaningful only in relation to the others, such that we cannot expect to understand them in isolation nor by seeking to define them reductively. It is through this notion of interconnectedness that he can be interpreted as responding to the problem of skilful but harmful practice: this is seen to fall away once we see that goods are meaningful only within a context of broader notions of the good. MacIntyre’s account develops the notion of self-reflection, thereby demonstrating how we should understand these broader notions of the good.

MacIntyre accounts for the self which undertakes self-reflection through his key notion of the good of a whole life. This he defines as a second kind of internal good which is realised through participation in a practice. MacIntyre identifies this as the good of a certain kind of life: citing the example of the practice of portrait painting, he observes that ‘it is the painter’s living out of a greater or lesser part of his or her life as a painter that is the second kind of good internal to painting.’ The good thus realised is internal to the practice to the extent that it cannot be understood independently of the self that participates. And nor is the self independent of the good of its whole life, being that with which it identifies and in terms of which it understands itself. The good of a certain kind of life is the good of the whole life, not just one or some subset of its skills. To the extent that the self as a whole is now within the ambit of self-reflection, self-reflective participation is much more than attaining to standards of excellence. Indeed, it can now be understood as taking a stance towards the self.

Self-reflection considers the good of the whole life, whereby to place in question the good of one’s whole life is to make an assessment of how one measures up against what is good or worth doing. But this does not necessarily involve the judgement or
guidance of another party, such as a mentor, in whom the self can recognise authority. In self-reflective participation in practices, this dimension of authority is internal to the practice. Thus, ‘[t]o enter into a practice is to accept the authority of [the] standards [of excellence], and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them.’

A certain stance towards the self is inherent in participation: the participant must subordinate himself to the standards of excellence and accept judgement in light of them, while at the same time understanding himself as having the potential to attain skill in, and possibly also mastery of, the practice. ‘It belongs to the concept of a practice . . . that its goods can only be achieved by subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners.’ The self-reflectively participating self recognises its potential and its limitations as aspects of itself yet to be fully understood, and its participation in the practice therefore as the means to realise the internal goods of the practice which must also include the good of the whole life.

MacIntyre’s account of self-reflection demonstrates the point that goods and values cannot be understood in isolation, these being meaningful only in relation to the self and in relation to practices. Moreover, his account demonstrates the point that goods are meaningful only within a context of broader notions of the good. These two points, which we can recognise as being valid both philosophically and pre-philosophically, are demonstrated by MacIntyre’s dual notion of internal goods. Thus, a particular internal good, embedded in a particular practice, is necessarily also embedded in broader notions of the good such as the general one of artistic excellence. Internal goods are species of more general goods that can be specified and realised only through participation in particular practices, where the self that participates realises the good of the practice as well as the good of the whole life.

2.7. Articulating a structured totality of goods.

MacIntyre’s account can be interpreted as integrating several Aristotelian notions. Among these is the notion that goods are meaningful only within a context of broader notions of the good. These broader goods might ultimately include the good towards
which a life is orientated, and this quintessential Aristotelian notion can be compared with MacIntyre’s notion of the good of the whole life. But there is much more to be said about the context within which goods are meaningful: being a context within which the self must continually confront the task of mediating between goods, it must clearly mean more than the collection of goods which the self recognises.

The context within which individual goods are meaningful is more rigorously formulated as a *structured totality*. This we can understand as an interconnected network, but in the substantial sense that individual goods in the network imply the unity of the whole, such that to recognise an individual good is to recognise its place in the whole. MacIntyre’s notion of the good of the whole life must be integrally part of this structured totality, and we can interpret it as such on his behalf. Thus, individual goods and the practices of realising them can be understood as being embedded in a form of life governed by some notion of the good life overall. Conversely, we can understand the good life as a notion implicit in particular goods and in the practices of realising them. Without committing to the full Aristotelian conception of the self, we can nevertheless understand MacIntyre’s account as accommodating, and indeed requiring, a substantial notion of the self as one whose self-reflective participation in practices is a process of *situating the self* within the structured totality of goods and excellences, governed by an orientation towards what Aristotle would call living well.

MacIntyre’s account places the self within a system of goods it recognises as such and to which it aspires to attain. While the Aristotelian notion of the self as being inherently orientated towards realising the good life is nicely accommodated by MacIntyre’s account, we might nevertheless raise the question of whether it can fully accommodate the way in which the self responds to the goods within which it situates itself.

We might object to MacIntyre’s account that to situate oneself within a structured totality of goods must mean more than attaining to standards of excellence: the good of the whole life must somehow include the self’s responses to that which it views with disdain or disgust. While we may understand these as deprivations of the good, thus with reference to the totality of goods within which the self situates itself, it is
not clear how the self might integrate these as part of its situating itself. It is not clear that it can be by participation in any practice or by attaining to any standard of excellence that the self responds to deprivations of the good as inevitably it must. To respond to wrongdoing must surely be a necessary part of being an agent in the world, such that a failure to do so is a failure to fulfil one’s potential. Korsgaard makes the point:

‘A life lived without friendship is hardly recognizably human; but so is a life lived without outrage, contempt, resentment and grief. One’s capacity for valuing is equally expressed and realized in responding to the good, the bad, and the deprivation of the good.’

We would seem to require a more general model self-reflection, in which responding to deprivations of the good is integrally part of the good of the whole life.

A more general model of self-reflection demands a richer conception of the self. In particular, it must be one which orientates itself with respect to the excellences to which it aspires as well as to the deprivations of the good to which it responds with disdain. Such deprivations of the good might be subtly or indeed ambiguously so, and the self’s activity of situating itself within a totality of goods must consist in much more than responding to some goods by aspiring to attain to them, while responding to others with disdain or disgust. Between these two end terms is a spectrum of goods, and deprivations thereof, with reference to which the self must situate itself. Indeed, among them may be inchoate notions of the good, and one such might be the SEE. Thus, we can consider the question of whether the SEE might be understood as integrally part of the totality of goods within which we situate ourselves. We might postulate that the SEE is something in which the self is invested: hitherto defined in terms of our investing the ecological entity with value, the SEE might now be understood as being among the goods with respect to which we situate ourselves. If this possibility is to be accommodated, then a more general model self-reflection is required.

144 Korsgaard, 2003: page 85.

Self-reflection must situate a self which is richly conceived within a structured totality of goods wherein those which are subtle and inchoate are included. Potentially among such goods is the SEE. A richer conception of the self is seen to correspond to the possibility of more subtle or indeed inchoate notions of the good such as this. But this correspondence is more than contingent: if we are to accommodate the possibility of more subtle goods, then a richer conception of the self is required. We begin to discern an even greater interdependency between a conception of the self and the goods within which it is able to situate itself. It is an interdependency between two notions which each must be understood in some substantial way, and this would suggest that the interconnection itself must be understood in some correspondingly substantial way. It becomes apparent that the nexus between the self and the goods within which it self-situates must be something more than mere contingency or rational choice; we cannot understand the self as situated within freely or rationally chosen conceptions of the good. While we have yet to account for the nature of this interconnection or interdependency, it is clear that the Sartrean self cannot be assumed: we cannot assume that the self is free to choose itself or the goods within which it situates itself.

The goods within which the self situates itself are to some extent those of its culture. As such, they intertwine to some extent with the self. This is not to suggest that the self is the communitarian self, but nor is it the Sartrean self. Between these two extremes is some account of the self that is situated within a structured totality of goods where the interconnection between self and good is one of identification. Identification is prior to choice: we are connected to our values to the extent that they are ours. As Korsgaard observes,

‘Given that human beings must lead a cultural life, we must care about the excellences of a cultural life, in much the same way that, given that we must

\[145\] Such goods might be, for the individual, those that contribute to its realizing its fullest potential, and for society, those that contribute to its flourishing. Liberty might be an aspect of this, but does not capture it fully. For the ecological entity, such notions as preservation and conservation hint at the fact that the good is something more than our needs and wants, but once again does not capture it fully.
lead a physical life, we must care about health, the excellence of a physical life.\textsuperscript{146}

While Korsgaard’s assertion that we \textit{must} care about those things that are ours would seem to eradicate all notion of choice, this is clearly too strong a reading, since it seems to suggest some notion of necessity, which would eradicate the possibility of reflection. Rather, her point can be taken to be that we care about something to the extent that it is in some way ours, or if indeed it is \textit{us} in some way, and that this is never a matter of rational choice. The self is situated within a network of goods with which, to varying degrees, it identifies, and by reflecting on these goods, the self is able to situate itself. Thus, the self is always situated already, but must situate itself nevertheless.

Korsgaard introduces the crucial notion of identification with the goods within which we situate ourselves. Following her lead, we can begin to understand the process of situating the self as much more than aspiring to standards of excellence, and never a simple matter of free choice. Rather, reflection and identification must be integrally part of this process. Situating the self must be a process of self-identification: to identify a good as such must be to \textit{identify with it} to some extent. But this does not entail a self that is slave to its values: we cannot understand the self as bound to its values nor as one that is free to choose them at will. Values and goods are open to reflection, however we can now see that such reflection is always \textit{self}-reflection: the values and goods are open to reflection only to the extent that the self is situated among them. In other words, we are able to reflect upon our goods and values only to the extent that they are ours. Avoiding the strong reading that we \textit{must} care about the values that are ours, we can say instead that their being ours is our ability to reflect upon them. Avoiding the vague notion of \textit{caring} about our values, which is a formulation we would otherwise have to justify as one that is not circular, we can say instead that their being ours is their being open to our critical reflection.

The notion of identification circumvents spurious notions of choice as it might pertain to our values: both the Sartrean self that is free to choose its values and the self that is bound to its values are spurious notions that are circumvented. As we have seen, our

\textsuperscript{146} Korsgaard, 2003: page 84.
stance is never a value-neutral meta-perspective, being instead a reflection upon evaluation which is itself evaluation. To identify a good as such is already to have taken an evaluative stance. Thus, while we never freely choose the goods within which we situate ourselves, nor do we freely choose to reflect upon them. It is only by finding ourselves situated among the goods and values which are ours that we are able to reflect upon them, and we are *always already* situated among them. The value-neutral meta-perspective is impossible, as indeed is the Sartrean free choice that would presuppose such a stance. Far from being bound to our values, our situating ourselves among them is to be always already reflecting upon them. Rather than choosing individual values or indeed reflecting upon individual values, it is the Aristotelian structured totality of goods and values within which we are situated in self-reflection. We find ourselves thus situated, and the question of which values we might choose, and on what basis we might choose them, simply does not arise.

Notions of situating the self lead us towards a more general model of self-reflection, and our question is whether such a model might accommodate the SEE as being among those goods with respect to which we situate ourselves. We have seen that such a model of self-reflection must be more than aspiring to standards of excellence, thus accommodating the possibility of goods which are subtle or indeed potentially inchoate, where the SEE would be one such. However, to the extent that self-reflection is inherently a process by which the self situates itself within a structured totality of goods and excellences through a process of identifying with those goods, an inchoate good being part of that structured totality would seem to require the self to identify with something which is inchoate. This would seem to be paradoxical if not incoherent, seeming to require identification with that which has itself not yet been identified. Thus, we have yet to reconcile the notion of the SEE as potentially inchoate with the notion of the self as one that finds itself situated within a network of goods and values with which it identifies.

The notion that goods are meaningful only as part of a structured totality may allow us to circumvent the problem of accommodating the inchoate good. To understand goods in this way is to shun any attempt to isolate an individual good or value with reference to which the self must situate itself. We cannot individuate the goods any more than the self can freely choose them: it is never a question of a self set against a
series of discrete goods with which it may or may not identify. Rather, it is the totality of goods which is prior, and which stands in some substantial relationship to a self which we may (indeed must) conceive in some substantial way. It is only within this structured totality that inchoate goods might emerge as a possibility in the first place. Only by understanding the self as situated within a system of goods and values which are irreducibly interrelated and interpenetrating might we accommodate the possibility of the SEE being an inchoate good which is integrally part of this system. Part of that interconnected system must be the potential for goods which are inchoate, or otherwise latent as part of the system, to emerge. Postulating this ‘depth dimension’ of the structured totality must prompt the question of how our situating ourselves might be the mechanism by which the inchoate is realised or made manifest.

2.9. Story as meaningful context.

Within the structured totality of goods must lie the potential for the inchoate to emerge and be made manifest. But we cannot assume that this will happen spontaneously: we have seen that it is our task to articulate the SEE, and if this applies to all such potentially inchoate goods, then we need some mechanism whereby this task might be undertaken. It is through articulation that the inchoate might emerge and become real, such that the self might be alive to it as a good in relation to which it understands itself. Thus, while we find ourselves always already among our goods and values, this does not entail that we have no part to play, that situating the self is a foregone conclusion or that the self is purely passive. Our task within a context which is always already meaningful is to articulate an understanding which is already ours. Never simply deciding to situate ourselves with respect to goods that we have chosen, our task is to make sense of the situations in which we find ourselves already. We need a mechanism whereby we might articulate or codify or systematise that which is meaningful already. Various writers have postulated the notion of story as one such.

Taking many forms from traditional stories to great novels to personal biography, story is a notion that is left undetermined, thus open to different interpretations. Korsgaard adopts the notion, postulating that it is a basic mechanism whereby meaningful phenomena are experienced as such in relation to each other. Korsgaard makes the stronger claim that it is only in relation to each other that meaningful
phenomena are experienced as such, and that story is the mechanism by which we are able to make sense of such phenomena. Thus,

‘One thing does not merely follow another: it justifies it, explains it, rewards it, punishes it, it is its climax, its culmination, its fruition, or its doom. The relation between the two events or objects gives both of them meaning and intelligibility.’

Korsgaard generalises the notion of story, extending it beyond poetry or literature to the everyday situations in which we find ourselves.

‘Whatever else it does, a good opera, a good scientific explanation, a good philosophical account, or a good passage from one room to another in a house must tell us a story.’

Korsgaard’s point is that we have no choice but to situate ourselves within a sense-making context, and that this latter is ordered as a story.

We might object that Korsgaard pushes the notion of story too far, to the point that it becomes trivial. To generalise the notion to this extent, however, usefully prompts the question of the purpose that the notion is intended to serve. In the case of finding our way from one room to the next, the notion is clearly superfluous, contributing little to accounting for our ability to situate ourselves spatially. If the notion is a genuine and viable one, then it must fulfil a genuine need: it must facilitate or enable or at the very least assist our relating ourselves to the phenomena that we find meaningful. If story has any meaningful role to play in our situating ourselves, then integrally part of this role must be its capacity to bring forth the subtle and the inchoate, to provide the context within which these can emerge and be understood and articulated.

To the extent that we need to articulate the inchoate good, story may be an indispensable notion. But story must be more than simply the means to describe such goods: it is not enough that the goods are enumerated dispassionately. An affective dimension is needed: we must be moved by the story. The crucial ingredient is first-personal relevance: the metaphor of story is meaningful only to the extent that it has relevance for our understanding of ourselves. To over-generalise and trivialise the

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notion of story, as aspects Korsgaard’s account seems to do, is to overlook this crucial ingredient.

Foremost among the classical notions of story is that of tragic drama, wherein rival goods each claim the allegiance of the protagonist. While tragic drama classically has a role in elucidating the rival goods between which the tragic hero is divided, it is our involvement in the story which is the crucial ingredient. And our involvement is inevitable if the story is one which meaningfully bears on the human condition. Thus, rather than merely juxtaposing good against rival good, tragic drama, and story in general, must claim *first-personal* allegiance to the goods in question. Rather than deciding (rationally or otherwise) whether some story has relevant content for us, we must be already implicated in the story. It is essential to the metaphor of story that the self is already claimed. Rather than some prior or fixed notion of the self that must be included within the meaningful context which we map as story, identification and allegiance must be inseparably part of the elucidation of the goods in question. The notion of story remains arbitrary to the degree that any place for the self within it is one that we need to find or impose.

An inchoate notion of the SEE might be articulated through our situating ourselves within the structured totality of goods of which it is integrally part. But such a context is meaningful only to the extent that we find ourselves already part of it, and our task would be to articulate our inclusion or implication in that context of meaning. Our implication must be prior, such that the question of our inclusion or implication does not arise; we must find ourselves already situated within some context of meaning but needing to articulate that situatedness nevertheless. However, it is not clear whether story has a role to play in this, and it is far from clear whether any narrative form of story can be understood as contributing anything to this task of articulation. We have already seen that our ethical task of articulating the SEE is not the task of the poet, and if we are to understand the role of story as part of our task of articulation, then a more general form would seem to be required. On the other hand, we must avoid the error of over-generalising or trivialising the notion of story. If the notion of story is to be a meaningful one, then it must be our means of apprehending a meaningful context of which we find ourselves already a part.
2.10. Finding ourselves already in context.

MacIntyre elaborates the point that a meaningful context is something of which we find ourselves already a part. For MacIntyre, our first encounter with phenomena is already meaningful, and story is inherently part of our apprehending phenomena as such. In the first-person perspective of the agent, the phenomenon is meaningful to the extent that it has some bearing on a role into which the agent finds itself to have already been cast. Central to MacIntyre’s notion of story is that of finding oneself drafted into roles. Intending the notion of role to be one in which personal identity is intertwined, MacIntyre postulates that story is our means of understanding such roles.

MacIntyre’s account of story begins with a very general observation about our ability to apprehend phenomena as meaningful. Observing that the intelligibility of human actions is prerequisite to our being able to characterise them, MacIntyre claims that “the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action as such.”\(^{148}\) In order to characterise human actions, we need to individuate them in terms of intentions. But intentions must be ordered both causally and temporally if we are to make sense of them, such that we may determine ‘what causal efficacy the agent’s intentions had in one or more directions, and how his short-term intentions succeeded or failed to be constitutive of long-term intentions.’\(^{149}\) A short-term intention may be to ride one’s bicycle to work, while various long-term intentions may include maintaining fitness and good health, reducing one’s contribution to greenhouse emissions, and saving money in order to be able to take early retirement from work. While we may observe the actions of the agent from the third-person perspective of the anthropologist, we will be unable to fully characterise them because our attempt to do so would be in ignorance of the agent’s long-term intentions. It is only within a meaningful context that actions can be fully intelligible, and only from within this context that we might fully apprehend them as such.

MacIntyre’s observation that intelligible action occurs within a meaningful context is the basis for his notion of roles. MacIntyre asserts that we enter society already drafted into roles, and we must learn what these roles are: our role is to understand

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\(^{148}\) MacIntyre, 2002: page 209.

\(^{149}\) MacIntyre, 2002: page 208.
our roles. It is in terms of these roles that our actions are meaningful; by acting (meaningfully and intelligibly) within our roles, we come to understand what these roles are. Story is the means to grasp these as intelligible roles. Thus,

‘Man is in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’.”

Understanding the roles into which we have been drafted is an imperative to the extent that personal identity is bound up therein. To find oneself cast into a role is to find oneself part of a history: personal narrative is embedded in social, cultural and historical narrative. For MacIntyre, this embedding in narrative is part of what constitutes identity:

‘The story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships.’

This reading of MacIntyre prompts the objection that it presupposes a communitarian conception of the self as one that is mired in tradition. MacIntyre might seem to suggest as much: ‘I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition.’ However, MacIntyre anticipates the objection: he replies to it, as we shall see, by conceiving of both our embeddedness in tradition, and of tradition itself, as inherently dynamic.

While we find ourselves already drafted into various roles, this does not mean that we simply know or fully understand our context as though it were from the outset fully given, hence in no need of further interpretation and explication. Embedding in narrative must be partially constitutive of identity as the self understands it, but is certainly not the whole of identity: part of the embedding in the narrative must be the

150 MacIntyre, 2002: page 216.
151 MacIntyre, 2002: page 221.
resources to re-interpret the embedding itself, to re-interpret the roles in light of the cultural and historical context they provide. Thus,

‘The fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, the neighbourhood, the city and the tribe does not entail that the self has to accept the moral limitations of the particularity of those forms of community. Without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists.’

We may be drafted into various roles simultaneously, roles which may overlap or indeed conflict with one another. Therefore we experience story as something of which we find ourselves a part yet something within which we must still situate ourselves. Situating the self must be a self-resituating of the already situated self. Never a passively inarticulate character in the story but an actor who interprets the role into which it has been cast, the self is always potentially the moral agent, and it is its potential for ongoing re-interpretation of the roles it finds itself playing in which its moral agency consists.

Further to his disavowal of the conservativism of the communitarian self, MacIntyre offers a dynamic notion of tradition itself. For MacIntyre, this stands in contrast to Burkean conceptions of tradition: these he asserts, are based on ‘contrasting tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict. Both contrasts obfuscate.’

Dismissing any such contrastive definitions and their inherent biases, MacIntyre understands tradition as being centred on some notion of the good, the pursuit of which gives the particular tradition its point and its purpose. Rather than merely accepting or agreeing upon or otherwise passively recognising the particular good in question, a tradition is constituted by the ongoing debate as to how best that good is to be pursued and realised.

‘Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead.’

MacIntyre elaborates:

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152 MacIntyre, 2002: page 222.
‘A tradition …is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.’\textsuperscript{152} Tradition as such is inherently dynamic, and our reaffirming our place within it can only be the dynamic one of reappraising the goods upon which it is centred.

MacIntyre’s account builds upon the notion that a meaningful context is something of which we find ourselves already a part. In particular, it elaborates the notion of story. For MacIntyre, story is a meaningful notion only to the extent that our re-interpreting our place within it is intrinsically part of our place within it. Our place within a meaningful context is our place within a tradition, which latter we discover by finding ourselves drafted into roles. Far from the communitarian self mired in tradition, the self that finds itself drafted into roles also finds the need to undertake a dynamic re-interpretation of those roles.

MacIntyre’s account has added much to the idea of a meaningful context. We can now see that to be situated within a structured totality of goods is via our finding ourselves drafted into roles which are meaningful within a tradition, which latter is constituted by a continuity of conflict over the pursuit of those goods. Conflict thus proves to be a pivotal notion, however in a sense more broadly conceived than the classical one of tragic narrative in which the conflict is between rival goods which each claim the allegiance of the tragic protagonist: rather than something to be resolved or overcome, conflict is something we might embrace.

\textit{2.11. Embodiment of conflict and the quest for unity.}

MacIntyre’s notion of tradition as embodying conflict invites a reappraisal of how conflict is part of our moral experience. Nussbaum expresses the inevitability of conflict between goods as the vulnerability of all value to luck and contingency:

‘I must constantly choose among competing and apparently incommensurable goods [such] that circumstances may force me to a position in which I cannot help being false to something or doing some wrong’. [these being] ‘not just the material of tragedy, but everyday facts of lived practical reason’.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{153} Nussbaum, 2001: page 5.
For Nussbaum, the incommensurability of goods is inherently part of moral deliberation; indeed, their incommensurability is irreducible. Nussbaum concurs on this point with MacIntyre, for both, ‘it is just what Plato takes to be impossible which makes tragic drama possible’. More than merely recognising conflict as an inevitable part of our moral experience, we might embrace it as such. Rather than something that should always be overcome, or indeed can always be overcome, we might embrace it as inherently part of our moral experience. To elaborate what it could mean to do so is our current task.

It is not an innocent assumption that the conflicts of moral deliberation could or should always be overcome. Inbuilt in such an assumption are presuppositions about how we might understand the self and its moral agency. Ultimately, the self is construed as the modern subject: presupposed by the foundationalist approach to normative ethics, the self construed as the modern subject would appeal to foundational principles in order to resolve its moral dilemmas. To the extent that it is detached or detachable from the roles in which it might find itself cast, its ought is the Kantian ‘ought’ which implies ‘can.’ But the tragic protagonist, as MacIntyre points out, is no such subject: it is denied the dubious luxury of detachment. It ‘is not choosing between allegiance to one moral principle rather than another, nor is [it] deciding upon some principle of priority between moral principles.’

Rival goods each claim the allegiance of the protagonist in tragic drama, and both must be recognised as placing a substantial and genuine claim upon the agent. The agent might become the tragic hero, but only by making a choice: it must choose allegiance to one good at the expense of the other. To do so, however, does ‘nothing to diminish or derogate from the claim upon [the self] of the other.’ Thus, ‘the tragic protagonist cannot do everything that he or she ought to do. This ‘ought’, unlike Kant’s, does not imply ‘can’.

We need not set out in pursuit of the elusive modern subject. Having already dismissed the foundationalist approach to normative ethics, we avoid the substantial assumptions about its moral agency and the ought to which it is beholden. Rival goods each claiming the allegiance of the self must be understood as more than the

154 MacIntyre, 2002: page 142.
155 MacIntyre, 2002: page 224.
moral dilemma of the modern subject disengaged from identification with any of its roles. Different roles each claim the self that finds itself already drafted into various roles. It cannot simply disengage from these roles, and to overcome its dilemma would require it to overcome itself. There is no guarantee of resolution for the self that finds itself cast into roles which come into conflict, and from which it cannot simply disengage, and the self may therefore find itself divided between different roles. Such a self lacks unity, since unity is guaranteed only in the detachment it is denied. For such a self, there is no appeal to foundational or prior or higher principles, and it must confront its dilemma and undertake the reinterpretation of its roles demanded therein. To do so is to authentically engage its moral agency.

Only the self which engages its moral agency may come to understand itself and the structured totality of goods within which it is situated. In this task, conflict proves to be productive if not invaluable: it is usually only through conflict of goods that we fully come to understand the goods in question. The insight is that it is often an acute moral choice, wherein we are compelled to act in contrary directions, that brings our values into relief. But the conflict is never a simple dipolar opposition: it is never a simple case of two isolated goods which we perceive as such. As we have seen, it is in light of the Aristotelian conception of interlaced goods that we avoid any attempt to isolate an individual good or value with reference to which the self must situate itself. Our experience of the conflict is not one between isolated goods, but as a division between roles into which we find ourselves having been cast. Such roles, as we have also seen, are meaningful within a tradition; through the roles into which it is cast, the self is a bearer of the tradition. This latter we can understand in analogy to a social institution in light of the insight provided by Anderson, who urges us not to ask what end or purpose it serves, but instead ‘of what conflicts is it the scene?’ MacIntyre identifies this as the Sophoclean insight that ‘it is through conflict and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are.’

In contrast to the modern disengaged subject for whom dilemmas are simply to be overcome, the self in a richer sense is one which embraces its dilemmas. Through understanding conflict, it is able to better understand the goods within which it is

157 MacIntyre, 2002: page 164.
situated, and between which it can be divided. Thus, ‘there may be better or worse ways for individuals to live through the tragic confrontation of good with good.’\textsuperscript{155} It is a potentially more fully and subtly self-articulate self that would embrace conflict. Being better able to understand the goods within which it is situated and between which it can be divided, such a self might situate itself in relation to richer notions of the good. Such goods might potentially include those inchoate goods whose articulation is demanded by the need to respond to the conflict.

The self’s attaining a state of being fully self-articulate can be understood as a unity that is never guaranteed. Finding itself divided between different roles, the self lacks unity, since unity is guaranteed only in detachment from its roles, which latter it is denied. Its only response can be a re-interpretation of the roles into which it finds itself cast. Only by undertaking this task of re-interpretation might the self be unified, its life brought to unity. Self-articulation through the re-interpretation of roles encompasses and embraces the conflicts of rival goods which bring into relief the goods concerned and thus also the ends and purposes of the self. Narrative, as the structuring of the life of the self, can therefore be understood as a quest: responding to the lack of unity it perceives as the need to integrate the competing demands of its various roles, the self seeks to integrate itself. ‘The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest.’\textsuperscript{158}


MacIntyre has shown that conflict is a rich notion through which we might come to better understand our goods and values. Taylor adds an extra dimension to the question of how the self relates to these goods: the force by which it is beholden to them, the force of their claim upon it. This affective dimension must surely be tacitly acknowledged by MacIntyre and Nussbaum: it is an essential part of classical tragedy that the tragic protagonist lacks the freedom to simply opt out, being inescapably beholden to the goods which claim its allegiance. By bringing this affective dimension to the fore, however, Taylor’s account is seen to build substantially upon MacIntyre’s.

\textsuperscript{158} MacIntyre, 2002: page 219.
Taylor observes that certain goods are incontestable. Thus, rather than being vulnerable to our deliberating or indeed agonising over them, such goods are those which we experience as commanding our respect. Alternatively, we could say that we experience such goods as givens, to the extent that we cannot be ambivalent about them. They are ‘given’ in that they are not open to our simply choosing not to acknowledge them. Taylor identifies goods that are in some sense ‘incomparable’:

‘There are ends or goods which are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured on the same scale as our ordinary ends, goods, desirabilia. They are not just more desirable, in the same sense though to a greater degree, than some of these ordinary goods are. Because of their special status they command our awe, respect, or admiration.’

Such incomparable goods are the basis of what Taylor identifies as strong evaluations, such that ‘the goods which command our awe must also function in some sense as standards for us.’

Taylor observes that the goods that have the strongest claim upon us are also the most difficult to articulate. He elaborates that the goods having the strongest claim upon us, being those most difficult to articulate, are those goods with which we most closely identify. This is the basis for his substantial point that ‘selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes.’ This turns out to be a central thread running through his account, and one which he gradually develops.

Rather than explicating a basis for the intertwining of selfhood and the good, Taylor is concerned with the way in which it is part of our experience as moral agents. In particular, inarticulacy about certain goods cannot be dismissed as ambivalence. Rather than necessarily assuming that inarticulacy implies a tenuousness of commitment, we can allow just the opposite. The intertwining of selfhood and the good means that the goods which command our respect do so because our being

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161 The explication of this point is Taylor’s task in Sources of the Self.
neutral or ambivalent about them ultimately amounts to our being neutral or ambivalent about ourselves. Taylor sums up the point:

‘Our identity not only presupposes points of moral reference in relation to which we define ourselves, but also itself constitutes a central moral issue. Whether one is true to one’s identity can never be a neutral issue. If it makes sense to be neutral towards it, then it is no longer this issue.’

The incoherence of ambivalence or neutrality about the goods that are the basis of strong evaluations is the incoherence of not identifying with oneself.

For Taylor, it is an essential part of strong evaluation that the good of the whole life is implicated therein. Thus, for the strong evaluator, ‘motivations or desires do not only count in virtue of the attraction of the consummations but also in virtue of the kind of life and kind of subject that these desires properly belong to.’ Taylor contrasts the strong evaluator with ‘the simple weigher of alternatives’: while reflection for the latter consists of weighing up consummation of desire with an estimation of its consequences, reflection for the former ‘is also defined by a qualitative characterisation of desires as higher and lower, noble and base.’ This must mean that the strong evaluator has a ‘vocabulary of worth’ which the simple weigher lacks. This facilitates a self-articulacy over and above that of the simple weigher, for whom reflection terminates in the inarticulate experience that one thing is more attractive than another. A vocabulary of worth is a language in which the superiority of one alternative over the other can be articulated. Moreover, its superiority can be understood only in light of ‘the kind of quality of life which it expresses and sustains’; its superiority cannot be articulated in absolute terms but only with reference to the whole life as one that is described in such terms as being integrated or noble or courageous or dedicated. The irreducibility of strong evaluations is that the good of the whole life is implicated.

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166 Flanagan understands Taylor’s notion of strong evaluation as having its basis in Frankfurt’s distinction between first-order and second-order desires, such that the strong evaluator evaluates her desires. Flanagan, 1996: pp. 204-5.
The irreducibility of strong evaluations means that the terms in a vocabulary of worth can be characterised only contrastively. For Taylor, the vocabulary of worth of the strong evaluator is a language of contrastive characterisation:

‘No one can have an idea of what courage is unless he knows what cowardice is, just as no one can have a notion of ‘red’ …without some other colour terms with which it contrasts. It is essential to both ‘red’ and ‘courage’ that we understand with what they are contrasted.’\(^\text{167}\)

While the inarticulate simple weigher is able to contrast his desires and calculate the consequences of their consummation, the articulacy of the strong evaluator consists in understanding the good of the whole life. Understanding an action as courageous or cowardly, noble or base, must necessarily take into account the form of the whole life which each expresses and sustains.

We can see that Taylor’s notion of strong evaluation implicates the good of the whole life in a manner comparable to MacIntyre’s notion of the good of the whole life as a good internal to practice. Much more than the bare judgement that one life is better than another, strong evaluations express and sustain some aspect of the life as being worthwhile or indeed worthy of respect or admiration. Thus engaging the goods which command our respect, strong evaluations engage those goods which have the strongest claim upon us. However, by allowing that these latter tend to be those which we find the most difficult to articulate, Taylor accommodates the good of the whole life in a richer sense than MacIntyre’s. More than the good of a certain kind of life identifiable as such, this good for Taylor may be one which we have yet to articulate, which only strong evaluations can express and sustain.

2.13. Navigating the moral topography of the self.

Taylor elaborates the notion of strong evaluation, exploring the ways in which we might express strong evaluation through contrastive characterisation. To this end, he introduces the key notion of orientation with respect to the good. Orientation is a rich notion, being one which would require a rich notion of the good: rather than a standard to which we may or may not measure up, the good is something to which we

\(^{167}\) Taylor, C. 1985: page 19.
can relate ourselves and our actions not just in terms of proximity, but also in terms of the direction in which we are headed. The good of the whole life is internal to the notion, and orientation with respect to the good can only be understood in a substantial sense as something that properly belongs to strong evaluation rather than the superficially consequentialist deliberations of the simple weigher of alternatives. Moral orientation can be understood as the unifying notion wherein strong evaluation and contrastive characterisation are internally related as two facets of the same task.

One major strength of the notion of orientation with respect to the good is that we can understand it as applying even when the good in question is unarticulated or to some extent inchoate. Such a good is something we would be unable to discern clearly but which we might nevertheless apprehend as some sort of guiding marker. Indeed, it is part of Taylor’s notion of strong evaluation that it is an evaluation that cannot be fully articulated, apprehending a fundamental good that is never fully known or grasped. Our expressing these evaluations can only be through contrastive characterisation. A language of contrastive characterisation must consist of something much more subtle than quantification or comparison, and we must account for how it is that we express strong evaluations and orientate ourselves with respect to the good concerned.

Elaborating on the idea that strong evaluation is by orientating oneself with respect to the good, Taylor observes that we rely upon metaphor in order to articulate our orientation with respect to the good. Moreover, we tend to rely upon spatial metaphors. Thus,

‘Our most basic and inescapable languages of the self incorporate spatial terms, most centrally within/without and above/below, [as well as] our sense of inner depths, the devaluing of some feelings as superficial, and so on.’

Taylor argues for ‘an inherent spatiality of the self’ whereby ‘the self exists essentially in moral space by means of a master image, a spatial one.’ The need to orientate ourselves with respect to the good is ultimately the need to integrate it. Integrating the good, however, is only ever implied through spatial metaphor.

‘Different, often indefinite and tentative senses of what integration consists of incorporate notions of where it might be found, in the sense of where the

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strength lies, where the sources or resources are situated, which could bring integration, or fullness about.\textsuperscript{169}

We can interpret Taylor’s notion of orientation through metaphor as enabling us to articulate the inchoate, and in such a way as to accommodate the richness of our experience without describing it reductively. We can see that his account accommodates this dimension of the inchoate: for Taylor, it is precisely the inarticulateness of the goods of strong evaluation in which the need for metaphor consists. Taylor accommodates the possibility that metaphor might in some cases be our only means of articulating the interrelationship between self and good.

For Taylor, there is a ‘moral topography of the self’.\textsuperscript{168} He asserts that ‘the self exists essentially in moral space.’\textsuperscript{170} ‘Essentially’ in this context is a term that is far from innocent; whether or not Taylor intends it, we can read it in the very strong sense that the essence of a self, part of what it is to be a self, is to exist in moral space. Thus, moral orientation is so fundamentally part of what it is to be a self that the question of moral orientation is inescapable.

‘Since we cannot do without an orientation to the good, and since we cannot be indifferent to our place relative to this good, and since this place is something that must always change and become, the issue of the direction of our lives must arise for us.’\textsuperscript{171}

The analogy with spatial orientation has an extra dimension that captures the point:

‘We couldn’t conceive of a human life form where one day people came to reflect that, since they were spatial beings, they ought after all to develop a sense of up and down, right and left, and find landmarks which would enable them to get around – reflections which might be disputed by others.’\textsuperscript{172}

We can see that there are two aspects to the analogy with spatial orientation. The first is that we orientate ourselves with respect to things we may not be able to clearly discern, such as distant landmarks. The second aspect is that spatial orientation is a precondition for our being able to act in the world. Our inability to distance ourselves

\textsuperscript{169} Taylor, C. 1988: page 301.
\textsuperscript{170} Taylor, C. 1988: page 300, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{171} Taylor, C. 1989: page 47.
\textsuperscript{172} Taylor, C. 1989: page 31.
from the issue of spatial orientation is the fact that the question of spatial orientation is ‘always already there, demanding and answer.’ The moral topography of the self should be understood as the thesis that the question of moral orientation is analogous to spatial orientation in that it is inconceivable that this question is not always already there.

To the extent that it more fully allows for the self to be treated as an open question, moral orientation can be recognised as a richer notion than that of personal narrative. Moral orientation is a notion that is also better suited to the good being left as an open question. By allowing and indeed requiring that the self may orientate itself with respect to as yet unarticulated goods, moral orientation allows for the possibility that the goods may be shaped to some extent by the very process of orientation. Taylor’s thesis that the self and the good are intertwined is thus invited by his notion of moral orientation.


Taylor elaborates the point that the goods with respect to which the self orientates itself may be shaped to some extent by the very process of orientation. As we have seen, orientation is a process of articulation: it is the process of articulating the interrelationship between self and good. But this must be simultaneously a process of articulating the good itself: it is only by orientating ourselves with respect to those goods that we come to understand them.

‘We come to understand in part what really characterizes the moral states we seek through the very effort of trying, and at first failing, to achieve them.’

Much more than mere description, articulation is our means of accessing the goods to which we relate ourselves. Taylor allows that we may perceive these goods without (yet) being able to clearly articulate them:

‘Our attempts to formulate what we hold important must, like descriptions, strive to be faithful to something. But what they strive to be faithful to is not an

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independent object with a fixed degree and manner of evidence, but rather an inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance."\textsuperscript{174}

Taylor’s account accommodates the inarticulate or inchoate good, and we have seen that it is the role of metaphor to facilitate our articulating or accessing these goods. But there is a stronger sense in which moral orientation articulates a good which is hitherto inchoate:

‘Articulations are attempts to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated. But this kind of formation or reformulation does not leave its object unchanged. To give a certain articulation is to shape our sense of what we desire or what we hold important in a certain way.’\textsuperscript{175}

Thus, moral orientation is in part a process of shaping the goods with respect to which we orientate ourselves.

We can see that Taylor’s account accommodates the possibility that there are more or less adequate articulations. A more adequate articulation is one that makes its ‘object’ accessible in new ways by shaping it in new ways; it simultaneously shapes and remains faithful to its ‘object’, the latter being that which we hold important. A good being or becoming accessible to us is the articulation being one that resonates with us. A resonant articulation is one that ‘rings true’, but for reasons we cannot necessarily articulate; it is accessible because it reaches or touches us, and opens us to new insight into what we hold to be important. To be thus opened to new insight, however, is a process of becoming more articulate; there are more or less adequate articulations, and we can add the corollary that there must be more or less articulate selves able to understand them as such. To be opened to new insight must be to attain to a clearer understanding of both the self and the good, and orientating the self with respect to the good must be a process of coming to a clearer understanding of both the self and the good.

We have touched upon Taylor’s thesis that the self and the good are intertwined, which can be discerned as a central thread running through his account. The intertwining of self and good is that the good is never fully independent of the self:

\textsuperscript{174} Taylor, C. 1985: page 38.
\textsuperscript{175} Taylor, C. 1985: page 36.
our coming to understand the good with respect to which we orientate ourselves is in part our articulating it in a way that our understanding it is made possible. To articulate the good is to ‘bring it home’ to the context within which it has meaning for us. The good is thus articulated by a self, for itself, which must mean that different selves will articulate a good in different ways.

Moral orientation of the self with respect to the good engages the interdependence of the self and the good. It must be a process of coming to a clearer understanding of the self and of the good, yet it must be more than this to the extent that neither the self nor the good are unchanged by it. The previously inchoate good that is articulated by the self becomes one that is able to be understood and is thus accessible, and the self that articulates the good becomes one that is able to access and understand the good in new ways. The self with a clearer understanding of itself is one with the potential to more clearly understand its motivations, and to understand more fully the context within which its actions are meaningful. We are motivated by what we hold to be important, which is underpinned by our understanding of the good, and a change in our understanding of the good must entail a change in our motivations. For Taylor, this is a constitutive relation:

‘Because of this constitutive relation, our descriptions of our motivations, and our attempts to formulate what we hold important, are not simple descriptions in that their objects are not fully independent.'"176

The intertwining of the self and the good, and their mutual articulation in moral orientation, is for Taylor a constitutive relation that can be expressed in different ways. One such is that ‘self-interpretations are constitutive of experience.'176 The insight behind this view is that we are motivated to act on the basis of a certain understanding or description of ourselves and of our role in some situation (or narrative), and ‘an altered description of our motivation can be inseparable from a change in this motivation."176 Thus, by seeing in a new light our motivation to act, we see ourselves differently, and are no longer motivated in quite the same way. It is a question of ‘gaining perspective’, where an altered description of our situation, or some predicament in which we find ourselves, means that the basis for our being

motivated to act is also changed. Taylor’s point is that to see our motivations and thus ourselves differently is to arrive at an altered self-interpretation, and that our experience is influenced by this self-interpretation. But Taylor is quick to emphasise that this is not a causal hypothesis:

‘It is not to say that we alter our descriptions and then as a result our experience of our predicament alters. Rather it is that certain modes of experience are not possible without certain self-descriptions.’

Taylor emphasises that the constitutive relation between the self and the good must not be read as a causal hypothesis. Thus, it is not the case that some self-description could or should give rise to some experience of the good, but rather that without a certain degree of self-description, a corresponding appreciation of the good is impossible. We can now see that orientating the self is a process of self-interpretation, whereby a degree of self-articulation enables an understanding of the hitherto inchoate good. We can also see that we should read ‘articulate’ in three senses, as the adjective, the intransitive verb, and the transitive verb: the articulate self, in virtue of having articulated the inchoate good and thus also itself to some extent, is able to articulate an understanding of that good. It is a matter of having the vocabulary of worth within which strong evaluation can be expressed and understood. Thus, self-description can be understood as enabling our appreciation and thus experience of the goods with respect to which we orientate ourselves.

2.15. Accessing moral sources.

The constitutive relation that obtains between self-description and appreciation of the good, or ultimately between the self and the good, is one in which both self and good are open to reinterpretation. The process of articulating a good which is hitherto inchoate thus has a component of immanent re-evaluation, in which ‘a largely inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance’ is reinterpreted through the process of articulation. Since, as we have seen, it is those evaluations with which we most closely identify that are the most difficult to be clear about, such an immanent re-evaluation is a process which ‘applies with the greatest force to our most fundamental evaluations, those which provide the terms in which other less basic ones
The language of contrastive characterisation in which strong evaluation is cast accommodates the contrastive differentiation of a fundamental evaluation only to the extent that other fundamental evaluations are thereby also differentiated. There is no recourse to fundamental terms since ‘the most basic terms, those in which other evaluations are carried on, is precisely what is in question.’\textsuperscript{178} Denied the possibility of deploying any foregone articulations of the good, ‘we are forced back …to the inarticulate limit from which they originate.’\textsuperscript{178}

A re-evaluation of our most fundamental evaluations might suggest a Nietzschean reading, however our examination avoids a Nietzschean ‘transvaluation’, and along with it any reading in terms of voluntarily re-evaluating our strong evaluations. A voluntary re-evaluation presupposes some basis of judgement upon which our most fundamental evaluations could be evaluated. The vicious circularity of this is self-evident and the notion is one we dismiss as spurious. Rather than being a question of our overcoming or otherwise coming to reassess any of our most fundamental evaluations, it is a question of how it becomes possible for us to access, in a way that allows us to be fully alive to and clear about, those goods that are behind our ‘largely inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance.’\textsuperscript{174}

For Taylor, these goods becoming accessible to us is their becoming available to us as moral sources. These he defines as that which empowers us to be moral. A moral source is more than any ‘inarticulate sense’: it is something which we can be clear about and to which we can appeal for justification. Thus it is central to Taylor’s thesis that ‘articulation can bring us closer to the good as a moral source, can give it power.’\textsuperscript{179}

Articulation is the means to access our moral sources, to become fully alive to that about which we have some ‘inarticulate sense’. This latter must be an experience of some sort, but one about which we are unable to be clear. Taylor elaborates this point. Thus, to be ‘forced back to the inarticulate limit from which [our evaluations] originate’\textsuperscript{178} must be to find ourselves perplexed in the face of that which we lack the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{177} Taylor, C. 1985: page 39.
\footnote{178} Taylor, C. 1985: page 40.
\footnote{179} Taylor, C. 1989: page 92.
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resources to express. That by which we are so perplexed is by definition the inarticulate or inchoate. Taylor observes that we experience the inarticulate as a question: we experience our pre-articulate feelings or emotions as perplexing, as raising a question. Justice is an easy example of such a good: it is a good we all recognise as such yet one that asks us again and again to articulate exactly what it means. Every new situation in which such an ostensibly familiar term arises is one in which we are confronted by that term as a question. We experience the inarticulate good commanding respect as this question demanding an answer, and moral orientation, like spatial orientation, is an unavoidable response to this question as one that is always already there.

2.16. The question of significance experienced as such.

We return to our original question, that of the significance of the ecological entity. It is a question we now have the resources to re-phrase, about which we can be more articulate. We can now see that question as one with considerable depth and as one that will not admit of any answer in the form of a reductive explanation. We can now discern several components to the question. We must now consider whether the SEE could be among those inchoate, pre-articulate goods with respect to which we orientate ourselves. Its being so would prompt the question of how such a pre-articulate good can come to function as a moral source for us, in virtue of which we are empowered to be moral. This is turn would prompt the question as to what it is to be a self that is so empowered. The multifarious question of the significance of the ecological entity can be encapsulated as the question of whether the SEE can be among those goods that function as guiding markers as we navigate the moral topography of the self.

Our apprehension of the SEE must be as a question that is always already there. The inarticulateness of the SEE must be a question that demands an answer in the form of our orientating ourselves with respect to it. Only thus is the SEE potentially a moral source for us, only thus can it have a dimension that must remain irreducible to prudential self-interest. As a moral source, it would empower us to be moral.

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However, we must access it as such; our ethical task is the task of articulation whereby such access might be gained. Our ethical task with respect to the ecological entity must be encompassed by the general task of articulation, the task of being ethical. However, while articulating the SEE can only be part of our broader ethical task, this does not guarantee its being a moral source for us. We still have not established that we must be ethical with respect to the ecological entity. Our philosophical task now, however, is more general: rather than establishing that we must be ethical with respect to the ecological entity, our task now must be to establish whether or not we are able to do so.
3. Articulating the significance of the ecological entity, articulating the self.

3.1. Introduction.

This chapter takes up the point that the relationship between the self and the goods with respect to which it orientates itself should be understood as a constitutive relation. In particular, it explores the question of whether the significance of the ecological entity might be among those goods for which a constitutive relation obtains. This question is whether the significance of the ecological entity (the SEE) might be articulated as integrally part of the moral orientation of the self.

Various historical accounts in which the self is internally related to the good are considered briefly, and all are discounted on the grounds that the relationship between self and good which they describe is not the constitutive relation which Taylor intends. But this does not mean that these accounts have nothing to contribute to this study: rather, we see that they assume a reified conception of the self, and that this reification is something we need to avoid.

Returning to and elaborating upon Taylor’s account of the self, we find that an active and reflective engagement of the self with its goods and values is inherently part of its being the self that it is. Thus, we see that the self is constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values. This strong sense of the constitutive relation between the self and its goods and values is found to be the basis for understanding selfhood as a task or goal or telos, such that selfhood is not something which is predetermined or fixed but something which must be achieved or attained. Seeking to understand whether the SEE might be integrally part of the task of selfhood is the point which instigates a move beyond Taylor’s account, a move which this chapter begins to explore.
3.2. A dual task of articulating the significance of the ecological entity.

We have seen that our encounter with the ecological entity is never an encounter with a value-free entity: our valuing the ecological entity is inevitably and inherently part of our encounter with it. To encounter the ecological entity is to value it, which we do in many and various ways; to do so is to apprehend it as significant, where significance can take many forms. The interesting and substantial sense of significance is one in which the evaluation involved might be the basis for our being moral. Such an evaluation would clearly engage much more than any superficially utilitarian or instrumental values, engaging instead our more fundamental values. This is Taylor’s notion of strong evaluation. Whether or not this sense of evaluation is inherently part of our encounter with the ecological entity is the point in question.

We have seen that our strong evaluations, being those with which we most closely identify, are those which we tend to find the most difficult to articulate. The goods apprehended in strong evaluation may be inchoate, pre-articulate goods that command our respect in a way about which we are as yet unable to be clear. We have also seen that we experience such goods, those that engage our most fundamental evaluations at their inarticulate limit, as raising a question. Should the SEE be among such goods, such that it is among those goods with respect to which we orientate ourselves as moral agents, then our apprehension of it would be as a question that is always already there, demanding an answer. Its potentially being among such goods means that the question of the SEE is both philosophically and pre-philosophically a real question, thus a question with which we find ourselves confronted and which we feel compelled to answer.

To articulate the significance of the ecological entity is a task that is both pre-philosophical and philosophical: pre-philosophically it is (potentially) part of our task of being ethical, while philosophically it is the task of articulating the SEE as a good that enables us to be ethical. In either case, it is clear that articulation must be more than mere description or conceptualisation: it must mean something far more

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181 Heidegger observes that ‘our dealings (Umgang) in the world and with entities within-the-world have already dispersed themselves into manifold ways of concern,’ and that these ‘concernful dealings’ are our investing things with value. Being and Time, pp. 95-96.
substantial than any new or novel formulation of the specific goods that we might conceive of things as instantiating. Thus, while the ecological entity might be described as significant to the extent that it represents biodiversity or unspoiled wilderness or remnant indigenousness, no such description captures the sense of the SEE that it is our task to apprehend. It is the possibility that the SEE might involve strong evaluation, thus being a substantial sense of significance which is not reducible to anything we might conceive as being inherent or indeed intrinsic to the entity, which motivates our philosophical investigation of the ways in which we might articulate the SEE.

Our task of articulation begins with our experience as moral agents. Following Taylor’s account, we have seen that we are empowered as moral agents through our being able to articulate the goods which command our respect. Should the SEE be such a good, then it would inform our strong (or moral) evaluation, and the strong evaluation which we would apprehend as the SEE would have an irreducible affective component. This latter we might struggle to articulate: as we have seen, there may be a gap between the immediate apprehension or appreciation of the SEE, and its articulation. Such a gap would be between an affective dimension of the SEE, and a conceptual dimension. However, our ethical task of articulation is not the task of the poet: it is not a matter of merely conceptualising a purely affective experience. Indeed, we cannot validly claim that the affective and conceptual dimensions of the SEE could be separated. While there may be a gap between these two dimensions of the SEE as we experience it, this cannot mean that there are two discrete components to our experience. Rather, it must mean that there may be more to the affective aspect than we are able to conceptualise. Our task, therefore, must be something more general than the task of the poet.

Our task must begin with our experience, which we must be able to apprehend as inherently evaluative, where evaluation is prior to any division between the affective and the conceptual. To this end we follow Taylor’s lead in understanding moral reactions as being prior to any such division, such that evaluation is immediate to the experience. In particular, such evaluation may include strong evaluation. The notion of the moral reaction thus describes an experience in a way that accommodates the possibility that strong evaluation is immediately part of it, while remaining free of the
need for any explanation as to how or why it should or must be so. As such, the notion is indispensable to a phenomenological investigation. Our question must be whether our encounter with the ecological entity might be a moral reaction: avoiding any assertions that it should be a moral reaction, our task is to investigate the ways in which strong (or moral) evaluation might be part of that encounter. As such, our task is to understand whether there might be a moral dimension to our encounter with the ecological entity.

3.3. Moral reactions and their implications.

Taylor’s notion of the moral reaction is intended to describe our experience as moral agents. It is the moment in which we are motivated to act as moral agents, thus an experience which involves evaluation which is potentially strong evaluation. There is thus a correlation between his notions of the moral reaction and of strong evaluation. While Taylor’s terminology shifts among ‘moral reactions,’183 ‘moral instincts,’184 ‘moral intuitions’185 and ‘moral responses,’186 we can nevertheless take his basic point to be that evaluation is inherently part of the experience, and that this may include the more fundamental evaluation he identifies as strong evaluation.

It is essential to the notion of the moral reaction that where there is strong evaluation, it is inherently part of the experience, and not anything that might subsequently be attributed to it, such as some causal effect or subsequent re-evaluation. The full richness of the initial experience must be accommodated as part of the moral reaction if the notion is to succeed. Part of this richness is the potential for it to include strong evaluations, which as we have seen are those we most closely identify with and find the most difficult to articulate, and the notion of the moral reaction must therefore accommodate the possibility that there is more to the experience than we are able to articulate.

Allowing for the experience to be both affective and conceptual, Taylor intends the notion of the moral reaction to denote the inherently evaluative experience, thus one

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which is distinct from the many ways in which we react to ordinary phenomena, such as in visceral or instinctive or reflexive reactions.\(^{187}\) For these latter, there clearly may be an affective component, but we cannot understand them as having any conceptual component. As such, they cannot be inherently evaluative: any evaluation can only be after the fact, and not inherently part of the experience.

Building upon Taylor’s account, we can see that moral reactions are also to be distinguished from aesthetic judgements as well as judgements on matters of refined taste. While one might argue that evaluation can be inherently part of these experiences, we can say that it is never strong evaluation as Taylor defines it. As we have seen, it is through strong evaluation that we locate and orientate ourselves with respect to the goods which command our respect, such that the good of the whole life is implicated. The moral reaction must be inherently a matter of moral orientation.

Taylor’s account of moral reactions draws out the implications of their being inherently evaluative. Thus, their being much more than visceral or reflexive reactions entails that they can be described as warranted or justified or appropriate to the circumstances.\(^{188}\) It would be a category mistake to describe a purely visceral reaction, such as aversion to a foul stench, as warranted or appropriate: these reactions have no conceptual dimension, and as such can have no evaluation as inherently part of them, much less strong evaluation. In other words, such reactions are never a matter of moral orientation. Our dismay at the unnecessary destruction of the ecological entity is, in contrast, a reaction that may be appropriate to the circumstances. While it may not unanimously be seen as such, it is clear that it might be a matter of moral orientation to the extent that strong evaluation might be involved. We have seen that goods and values must be understood as meaningful within a network or structured totality, and it follows from this that the evaluation inherent to the moral reaction means that the reaction must be context-bound in the first instance. Its being so means that the question of its appropriateness can arise. For the visceral or reflexive reaction, this question cannot arise.

Being context-bound in the first instance, moral reactions are meaningful reactions. We can understand this at two levels: they have meaningful content to the extent that this is in part conceptual and evaluative, and they are inherently connected to a meaningful context. For Taylor, this places demands upon us: while one could not be accused of being inconsistently nauseated, ‘we feel the demand to be consistent in our moral reactions.’\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: page 7.} It is the integration of strong evaluation that both enables us to make sense of our moral reactions, as well as demands that we do so: as we have seen, matters of strong evaluation are by definition those about which we cannot be ambivalent. Taylor elaborates that this meaningful context is implicit in the moral reaction itself. Thus, moral reactions have two sides: ‘not only ‘gut’ feelings but also implicit acknowledgements of claims concerning their objects.’\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: pp. 3-4.} Implicit in the moral reaction is what is variously described by Taylor as a background picture,\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: page 9.} background assumptions,\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: page 17.} a moral framework,\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: Chapter 2.} and a moral ontology.\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: page 17.} His terminology shifts towards more adequately reflecting this demand for consistency: ‘background picture’ and ‘background assumptions’ are later supplanted by ‘moral framework.’\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: Chapter 2.} It is a key point for Taylor that through their implicit demand for consistency, our moral reactions carry implicit assent to the background picture or moral framework.

The notion of the moral reaction is a substantial one to the extent that a moral framework is implied: philosophically, something substantial is implied by the notion of the moral reaction, while pre-philosophically, something substantial is implicit in the reaction itself. Therefore it is our task, both philosophically and pre-philosophically, to make sense of our moral reactions. The background picture implicit in our moral reactions could be called an ontology, and the attempt to spell it out could be called an ontological account. The latter term is usefully ambiguous between the philosophical and the pre-philosophical: we might understand an ontological account to mean any articulation of the content of our moral reactions. For Taylor, ‘ontological accounts have the status of articulations of our moral instincts. They articulate the claims implicit in our reactions.’\footnote{Taylor, C. 1989: page 7.} We can understand
such an articulation to be either philosophical or pre-philosophical; be it an ontology somehow implicit, or an ontological account more or less adequately articulated, the key point is that our moral reactions have an implicit content which it is our task to explicate.

3.4. An immanent task of articulation.

The need to be consistent in our moral reactions and the need to make sense of them can be understood as two facets of a demand that is internal to the reactions themselves. They are, by definition, inherently meaningful reactions, such that there exists the potential for their meaningful content to be understood within a meaningful context. It is making sense of our moral reactions which makes the goods implicit therein accessible as moral sources, or in other words, it is making sense of our moral reactions which empowers us as moral agents. Our moral reactions thus demand of us that we be the moral agents that we are: they have an implicit content which it is our task to explicate, an implicit content which is integrally part of the moral ontology. To place these goods in their meaningful context is to orientate ourselves within this same context, being the structured totality of goods within which we orientate ourselves as moral agents.

Should the SEE be among those goods which are integrally part of the meaningful content of our moral reactions, then the need to articulate the SEE would be integrally part of our need to make sense of the moral reaction. We feel the need to articulate the meaningful content of our reactions, such that:

‘what is articulated here is the background we assume and draw on in any claim to rightness, part of which we are forced to spell out when we have to defend our responses as the right ones.’

Should the SEE be integrally part of this process, then our dismay at the destruction of the ecological entity would be something we could understand as a moral reaction. That is, it could be understood as a reaction with meaningful content. While we would appropriately draw upon this meaningful content in making the claim that the

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act of destruction was morally wrong, more to the point is that this meaningful content would demand that we make sense of it.

Should our dismay at the destruction of the ecological entity be something we might understand as a moral reaction, then our making sense of it as such is something we would feel compelled to do. But this must mean more than merely being able to cite some reason for our reaction or explain it away. Merely citing the value of biodiversity or land conservation or the preservation of wilderness will not suffice. To make sense of our reaction must be to draw out its meaningful content, and it is clear that this must be something much more than such purely conceptual and indeed hackneyed notions as biodiversity. Chapter One has shown that our being ethical with respect to the ecological entity, should this be possible, cannot stand apart from our overall task of being ethical. To cite some reason such as biodiversity is simply to reiterate the error of asserting ecocentrism or intrinsic value. Our making sense of our moral reaction begins with allowing for it to have more than conceptual content, and that it is integrally part of our overall task of being ethical.

Taylor alerts us to the danger that an inarticulate notion (such as the SEE) might be elided in favour of some purely conceptual and hackneyed notion (such as biodiversity). He notes a tendency to appeal to familiar notions rather than to attempt to articulate the inchoate notions we might apprehend in our moral reactions. The result is that that which genuinely empowers us as moral agents, the moral ontology, ‘tends to remain unexplored.’\(^{194}\) Moreover:

‘Exploration may even be resisted. That is because there may be …a lack of fit between what people as it were officially and consciously believe, even pride themselves on believing, on one hand, and what they need to make sense of some of their moral reactions, on the other.’\(^{194}\)

Thus, the resources we need in order that our reactions make sense may not be those that we tend to deploy in defending those reactions. To the extent that our means of genuinely accessing our moral sources is eclipsed, our ethical task, the task of articulation, is obscured.

Making sense of our moral reactions must mean something much more substantial than having the conceptual resources to defend our stance as correct or warranted.
Articulation of moral sources must engage much more than the agent’s opinions or beliefs: it must engage the agent’s self-understanding, not just its capacity to conceptualise. The paradox is that the verbally articulate espousal of one’s stance may be a stance of inarticulacy: an espousal of some moral standpoint on the basis of some ethical principle can be understood as an inarticulate espousal to the extent that it does not resonate with our moral reactions. Its inarticulacy is its failure to articulate the goods with respect to which the self orientates itself as a moral being.

The key point is that our making sense of our moral reactions must be understood in terms of the constitutive relation between the self and the good. Those goods implicit in our moral reactions are those that are part of this constitutive relation; stated in the first person, they are those goods in terms of which we understand ourselves. It is on this point that we can see the shortcomings of something so purely conceptual as biodiversity: to the extent that we can understand ourselves as part of that biodiversity, the term is not incorrect. But nor is it sufficient: it does not equip us to understand ourselves as moral agents, nor empower us to act on the basis of this understanding. Indeed, to claim that biodiversity is the means to articulate the SEE as a moral source can only be to reiterate the naturalistic fallacy.

Should the SEE be among those goods which are integrally part of the meaningful content of our moral reactions, then it can only be in terms of the constitutive relation between the self and the good that we might understand how this is so. This must mean that the task of articulating the SEE as such a good, should it be possible, could not be separated from the task of articulating the self. As such, it would ultimately be an immanent task of articulation. This is a substantial point, with substantial implications which we now set out to explore.

3.5. The inescapability of assent.

Pre-philosophically, our moral reactions demand of us that we make sense of them. But this cannot mean that we should seek some external explanation in order to do so: Taylor’s account is based upon the idea that they can, and indeed must, be understood independently of any foundational principles. Moral reactions are inherently meaningful to the extent that their meaningful content connects us with a meaningful
context. This is not to suggest, however, that they come with any ready-made answers: the self that is provided with ready-made answers would be completely passive, and indeed robbed of its moral agency. An active sense of the self is integral to the notion of moral reactions, although clearly not in a voluntarist or Sartrean sense. It is an active self in the sense that it must actively articulate the meaningful content and context of its moral reactions.

As we have seen, it is the inclusion of strong evaluation that renders moral reactions inherently meaningful. The integration of strong evaluation enables us to make sense of our moral reactions while at the same time demanding that we do so; matters of strong evaluation are by definition those about which it is impossible for us to be ambivalent. As we have seen, the goods implicated in strong evaluation are those that command our respect, being those that we encounter as ‘incomparable’ or ‘given’. But this does not mean that they are ‘given’ in the sense that they are given to our complete understanding. It is in our moral orientation that we encounter these goods, and our orientating ourselves with respect to them is always our situating ourselves within a system of goods and values which are irreducibly interrelated and interpenetrating. Our re-interpretation of our place within this system of goods is demanded, since we experience such goods as the question of our relationship to them. In the case of those ‘incomparable’ goods which command our respect, we experience such questions as inescapable. Our situating ourselves within this framework, the moral ontology, is our providing ‘contestable answers to inescapable questions.’

Moral orientation, like spatial orientation, is inescapable: it is a process of responding to inescapable questions. Our answers to these questions, however, are always contestable: there are no underlying principles which would dictate the right answers. Moral orientation is the right and the responsibility of the individual, such that different individuals will situate themselves differently with respect to the goods to which they are (individually) beholden. Furthermore, our evaluations are always subject to potential re-evaluation. The demand implicit in our moral reactions is not that we articulate them ‘correctly’, but that we do so consistently. Through their

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implicit demand for consistency, our moral reactions carry implicit assent to the moral ontology, and it is our being connected to the moral ontology that enables our moral reactions to be meaningful. The inescapability of moral orientation is the inescapability of assent to the moral ontology. Assenting to any particular good is never foreordained or inescapable: rather, it is assent *per se* that is inescapable. Its inescapability is that we have no choice but to make sense of our moral reactions.

### 3.6. Distinguishing inescapability and necessitation.

Inescapable assent to the moral framework is misconstrued if the link between moral reactions and the moral framework that is understood as one of psychological necessitation. This can only be an impoverished understanding, suggesting some automatic or instinctive or compulsive or otherwise involuntary process. Such an interpretation would suggest that the moral framework is some objectifiable thing that could be spelled out like the visible spectrum of colours or the serial ordering of musical tones. As an order of goods, potentially discernible by all but hitherto partially occluded, it would be something which everyone might come to see after a process of moral education. This is the Classical notion of the ‘ontic logos,’ in which the world is ordered for the good,¹⁹⁷ and moral agency consists in seeing that good and thereby being compelled to act in accordance with it. While there can today be no suggestion that this might be a plausible account of moral agency,¹⁹⁸ we can nevertheless postulate that moral agency is to be understood in terms of an essential relationship with the moral ontology. Thus, we need to be clear that the moral ontology is not the ontic logos, and that our inescapable assent to the moral ontology is not psychological necessitation.

To the extent that there is presumed to be a gap between the good we perceive and the good we might come to perceive, we might suspect that the influence of the notion of the ontic logos remains. Residual traces of the ontic logos might be interpreted to persist in contemporary accounts of intrinsic value, whereby the ecological entity instantiates some good or value which we are failing to see. We need not reiterate the failings of accounts which seek to establish the reality of a good we are failing to see;

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more to the point is that a conception of the moral agent is presupposed, as one that passively perceives the goods which phenomena instantiate. As Chapter Two of this study has shown, such a conception of the agent or self can only be a very limited one, being one for whom moral orientation is not an actively self-reflective undertaking. Moreover, the self is construed as merely relating to entities in their capacity as mere objects. Thus construed, the self is understood as passive rather than inherently active, the kind of self whose connection to the order of goods would be one of psychological necessitation.

The subject which relates to entities as mere objects is a conception fraught with difficulties which historical accounts have sought in their various ways to overcome. Foremost among these difficulties is that we need to account for the moral judgements of the subject as more than mere preference. This concern underlies the eighteenth century Sentimentalist notion of a ‘moral sense.’ Observing that moral judgements cannot be derived from merely prudential ones, Hutcheson and Hume postulated a moral sense. For Hutcheson, the non-derivability of moral judgements can be taken as evidence for a moral sense. Sentimentalism can be understood as the notion that the capacity to distinguish virtue from vice is based on feeling rather than reasoning that it is so, and it is this capacity that would heal the breach created by the assumption of a subject that relates primarily to objects. There are two ways in which we could conceive of the moral sense: either it detects moral qualities, or it approves and disapproves of neutral properties. Thus, either the subject is neutral and the world has moral qualities, or the world is neutral and the subject projects upon it moral judgements. In either case, a detached subject is assumed: it is a subject which either perceives the good as a matter of necessity, or approves and disapproves as a matter of necessity.

A detached subject bears little resemblance to the self whose moral agency consists in moral orientation. For the latter, perceiving the good is a matter of active self-reflection. It is an immanently engaged self, for whom the issue of having first to put itself into relation to the good does not arise. Our capacity to make moral distinctions

200 Callicott has postulated that a Humean moral sentiment might be the basis for our being environmentally ethical. Callicott: 1982; and 1993b: pages 117,126 and131.
is not in question, and is never a real question for any examination that begins with our experience as moral beings. To begin thus is to eschew any attempt to explain or ground our experience; our aim is explication not explanation. By construing the self as a subject which relates to objects, theories of the moral sense have already begun to explain our experience, and have thereby committed themselves to a task they are unable to complete. But the self, in contrast, is always already related to the good, and its ability to be moral is never in need of explanation. We have seen that the intertwining of the self and the good, and their mutual articulation in moral orientation, is a constitutive relation: the mutual interdependence of self and good is that moral orientation is a process of shaping both. Never the reified subject, the self is always in the process of being actively shaped by the self-reflective process of moral orientation.

We have seen in Chapter Two that the constitutive relation between self and the good is not a causal relation: it is not the case that a certain degree of self-description could or should give rise to some experience or appreciation of the good. Rather, the claim is that without a certain degree of self-description, a corresponding appreciation of the good is impossible. Much more than the subject bound by some psychological necessity passively to register the good, the self is one whose inescapable assent to the moral framework or ontology is a dynamic and self-reflective process. The inescapability of its assent is simply the inescapability of its being a self: to be a self is to be engaged in this self-reflective process. To be a self is to have moral reactions; to be a self is to respond to the demand internal to these inherently meaningful reactions that we make sense of them. Implicit in them is the moral ontology which, as we have seen, is that structured totality within which goods are meaningful only in relation to each other.

Among those goods which constitute the moral ontology are those that are the basis of our strong evaluations, such goods being those that we encounter as incomparable or incontestable. Our question is whether the evaluation which is inherently part of our encounter with the ecological entity might be strong evaluation. Its being so would be the basis for our being moral towards the ecological entity. Its being so would not, however, entail that to be a moral agent is necessarily to be moral towards the ecological entity: this would be to reiterate the error of Sentimentalism. Such a rigid
and reductive reading quite misses the point of Taylor’s notion of the moral ontology as something with which the self must continually and reflectively engage. We inescapably assent to a moral ontology which may or may not include those goods we perceive as the SEE.

3.7. Romanticism and the normative significance of the aesthetic.

Much more than the reified subject bound passively to register the good inherent in the phenomena to which it relates as mere objects, the self is related to the good in a way that is constitutive of its being a self. This constitutive relation between self and the good is actively and self-reflectively engaged by the self in its moral orientation. As something with which the self must continually and reflectively engage, the moral ontology could in some sense be said to be made manifest through such a process. Elaborating upon this idea has been the motivation behind accounts which postulate some expressivist notion of the self, a notion which draws upon the tradition of German Romanticism. Being a self that actively engages the good, the Romanticist self is an improvement over the passive self with mere moral sense. Nevertheless, this also proves to be problematic: while it is more than the subject that relates to phenomena as mere objects, the Romanticist self will be seen to be a distorting reification of the self, although a very different one to that presupposed by Sentimentalism.

Romanticism is a vague phenomenon, and a notion too broad to be fully expounded in this study. Nevertheless, there are ill-defined notions of Romanticism which need to be disaffirmed: we find in the contemporary eco-philosophical literature a range of quasi-Romanticist ideas affirming the interconnectedness of living things and idealised notions of the re-integration of nature and culture. In particular, it is the vague and ill-defined notions of the self which these accounts presuppose that need to be disaffirmed. Affirming the individual and its powers of imagination and feeling and self-expression, such accounts of the self can too easily slide into facile affirmations of its expressive power of manifesting its interconnectedness with nature.

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202 There are variations on this theme. One such is a strand of ecofeminism which argues that instrumental rationality and technology have severed our connection with organic nature. Merchant, 1983.
Romanticist-inspired eco-philosophical accounts aim to affirm an idealised conception of the self as one that is unified and integrated: the self that is unified within itself is propounded as one that is also integrated with the natural world. It is in the Romantic expressivist self that these accounts claim to find the resources to account for such a self as something we might aspire to bring about.

‘The Romantic expressive outlook points to an ideal of perfect integration, in which both reason and sensuality, the impulse within and nature without, are harmonized.’

Typically accompanying this affirmation of unity are affirmations of intuition over intellect, emotion over calculation, and nature over culture. Such affirmations, however, presuppose a conception of the self which, as we shall see, is problematic.

A Romanticist conception of a unified and integrated self presupposes that it is within our power to bring it about: the self is assumed to be one that can be understood in terms of its quest for integration and unity, as well as one for whom these are attainable. It is a self whose engagement with the good is a process of that good being made manifest, such that the self is conceived in a way that it is actively engaged with the good. However, we will see that while the constitutive relation between the self and the good, which we seek to understand, should be understood in an active sense, it must be understood in a sense which is not the same as the activity of the expressivist self as it actively engages with the good.

Rather than coming to see a hitherto occluded good as was the case with the Classical ontic logos in which the world is ordered for the good, the expressivist self of Romanticism has a more active role to play. Thus, it actively and creatively engages the good, which is thereby made manifest. This manifestation has a specific locus which is exemplified by the work of art: the work of art is

‘the locus of a manifestation which brings us into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible, and which is of the highest moral or spiritual

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203 Ecopsychology identifies such a self as the ‘ecological ego.’ Roszak, 1993: Chapter 11.
206 These ideas are more fully explored in Chapter Four.
significance; a manifestation, moreover, which also defines or completes something, even as it reveals.  

The good is made manifest by the artist, who has an ‘epiphany of translucence’; whereby ‘something deeper shines through the real.’ This ‘something deeper’ is a significance which can be realised and expressed only through the work of art. Art as making manifest is more than mere mimesis: it is a process of realisation not representation, such that the object is transfigured by the epiphany. Its transfiguration is its being rendered translucent, such that its meaning shines through it. While the object is appropriated in the process of something else being realised through it, this is nevertheless an appropriate response to the object, which rightly commands this response. Significance for this expressivist self is irreducibly mediated: the good is inseparable from the medium through which it is expressed.

These ideas lead us on a direct path to the question of the normative significance of the aesthetic, and Kant’s concept of the beautiful as a symbol of the morally good. A thorough consideration of this vast topic is beyond the scope of this investigation. Nevertheless, it is clear that the self presupposed therein is not the self we seek to understand in terms of a constitutive relation between self and good. The self that has the epiphany of translucence is one for whom a particular experience (the experience of the beautiful) has a particular normative significance, thus for whom the implicit content of its experience is foreordained. The self whose experience is thus laden is one that must also be laden with content: such a self must come laden with minimum requirements and capacities for being able to apprehend the normative significance of its experience. Being encumbered with minimum requirements for moral agency, this ‘thick’ Kantian subject is similarly encumbered with the need for substantial justification. This cannot be the unencumbered self which is appropriate to a phenomenological investigation which eschews explanation in favour of explication.

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209 *Critique of Judgement*, Part 1, Section 1, Book 1.
210 We have already seen that this notion has been adopted by contemporary eco-philosophy, whereby a sense of beauty is postulated as the basis for our being environmentally ethical. Austin, 1985.
Be it the expressivist self of Romanticism or the thick Kantian subject, it is clear that any conception of the self as one which is dependent upon some special kind of experience in order to come to see the good is not our concern. Rather than appealing to the aesthetic experience as that which shows the way to the morally good, our concern is to understand the ordinary moral reaction as inherently evaluative in such a way that it is already a recognition of the good.

Rather than some particular self with certain particular capacities or tendencies, or one that has some particular experience, the self for whom there is a constitutive relation between the self and the good is any self that understands itself as such. Such a self is neither necessarily nor ideally an artist or poet, and nor is it dependent upon the artist or poet to bring about the creation that reveals something deeper that shines through the real. Its task is not the task of the poet, and the question of its orientation within and with respect to the moral ontology is a question that is always already there. Unencumbered by any necessary content that would necessitate assent to the moral framework, the inescapability of assent is instead the inescapability of being a self, where to be a self is to orientate oneself with respect to the moral ontology. The question of the self’s proximity and orientation with respect to the good is for the self a question that is always already there. In other words, ‘we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good,’ Our seeking and finding such an orientation is our making our way in the world.

3.8. The translucence of ordinary goods.

Rather than some special or particular experience of some particular conception of the self, our concern is to understand the ordinary moral reactions of any self at all. Being inherently evaluative, the moral reaction must already contain some degree of understanding of the goods involved in the evaluation. Our task of articulating this evaluative content is not the task of the poet: it is not the task of bringing about an epiphany of translucence. In other words, our understanding of the good need not be mediated through the aesthetic experience. But this does not entail that it is not

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211 Taylor, C. 1989: page 34.
otherwise mediated: it does not entail that understanding of the good is necessarily immediate to our experience. We have already seen that a full and complete understanding of the good is never immediate to our experience; indeed, a full and complete understanding of the goods involved in our strong evaluations is something we may never attain. Such goods, the most fundamental goods are, as we have seen, the most difficult to articulate. But we must apprehend them nevertheless: the paradox is that we are most empowered by that which we are least able to express. If their being known to us is mediated, then such mediation of the good must mean something more general and prosaic than anything that is dependent upon the epiphanies of translucence of the poet.

While it is a reductionism to conceive of the moral reaction as a purely passive experience, it is also mistaken to conceive of it as something the self undertakes self-consciously. This is in contrast to the aesthetic experience of the expressivist self, for whom this experience comes about as a result of a creative act that is self-consciously undertaken as such; like its unity and integration, its coming to see the good is construed as something at which it must self-consciously aim. While the moral reaction must also be understood in some active sense, it is not in this simple sense of a volitional undertaking. The moral reaction is not something we decide to have in order to apprehend the goods involved in the evaluation which are inherently part of the reaction. An active sense of the self is internal to the notion of the moral reaction, however this cannot be in the implausible sense of our deciding to have the reactions, nor in the sense of our self-consciously deciding to unpack the reactions as we experience them. The self must be conceived as active in some prior, non-deliberative sense, and some suggestion that the self should be conceived as such can be found in Taylor’s account.

Taylor draws a distinction between the goods which we self-consciously pursue, and those which empower us as moral agents but which we might grasp only partially or indirectly. Thus, life goods are the overt ends and purposes of the self, while constitutive goods are the potentially inarticulate, inchoate goods that are the basis for its strong evaluations. Constitutive goods are those more fundamental goods that are
nearer to ‘the inarticulate limit from which they originate,’\(^{212}\) those inchoate goods with respect to which we orientate ourselves nevertheless. For Taylor, the constitutive good is closely identified with the moral source, whereby loving it is what ‘empowers us to do and be good’.\(^{213}\)

It is in this distinction between different kinds of good that Taylor alludes to some prior sense in which the self might be conceived as active, however it is a possibility which we must explore on his behalf. Thus, while ‘doing and being good’ is something we might self-consciously pursue, we can see that loving the constitutive good is not a simple volitional undertaking in the same sense. But nor can it be completely passive, since this would simply reiterate the error of Sentimentalism. By hinting at the possibility that the self may be understood in an active sense which is not a self-conscious or deliberative sense, Taylor’s account touches upon a substantial point. He elaborates his distinction, and thereby elaborates indirectly on this point.

For Taylor, constitutive goods and life goods cannot be understood in isolation of each other. Indeed, he makes the claim that they are internally related:

‘We cannot consider the life goods in a culture as self-contained, as without internal relation to various possible articulations of constitutive goods.’\(^{214}\)

Taylor elaborates that this idea applies generally, not just to the philosopher and the reflective pre-philosophical self, but also in the most general of senses:

‘Unreflecting people in the culture, who are drawn to certain life goods, may have nothing to offer in the way of description of constitutive good[s], but that doesn’t mean that their sense of what is worth pursuing isn’t shaped by some unstructured intuitions about their metaphysical predicament, about their moral sources being within or without.’\(^{215}\)

While Taylor can be interpreted as suggesting that some degree of engagement with the constitutive goods is integrally part of the self’s making its way in the world in pursuit of its life goods, he does not elaborate upon the question of the degree to which this must be understood as a reflective engagement.

\(^{212}\) Taylor, C. 1985: page 40.
\(^{213}\) Taylor, C. 1989: page 93.
\(^{214}\) Taylor, C. 1989: page 308.
For Taylor, the constitutive goods are implicit in the everyday choices of the self, thus mediated by the life goods of the self as it makes its way in the world. Mediation can therefore be understood in a way that is general and prosaic, and thus not in any way dependent upon the epiphanies of the poet. Taylor does not offer examples of constitutive goods, but we might do so on his behalf: being those goods in terms of which we understand ourselves, we might surmise that these would include such things as rationality or humaneness or compassion or perhaps any of a range of personal virtues. We can understand ourselves as articulating these constitutive goods to the extent that we choose and act in accordance with them, but without self-consciously pursuing them as ends in themselves. They are, as such, more nebulous than the life goods, which latter are the overt ends of the agent which it self-consciously pursues.

To the extent that our life goods are informed by our constitutive goods, we could say that the latter are refracted through the former. Indeed, we could say that our life goods are ‘translucent’ to our constitutive goods, such that reflection upon the former might afford us some insight into the latter. But this need not mean that reflecting on our life goods will necessarily lead us to any meaningful articulation of our constitutive goods: reassessing one’s life choices is internal to making them, and to reflect upon them and reassess them therefore says very little. Moreover, our life goods do not demand that we make sense of them: while some insight into our constitutive goods might be afforded by reflection on our life goods, this cannot be said to be a demand which is internal to them. It is on this point that our life goods stand in contrast to our moral reactions: as we have seen, it is an essential part of the definition of the moral reaction that they demand that we make sense of them. We have seen that the genuinely moral evaluations integrally part of our moral reactions must be distinguished from other higher-order evaluations such as aesthetic judgements and judgements on matters of refined taste. Our life choices and life goods are surely intermingled with our ordinary desires, and we must suspect that the interrelationship between these and our constitutive goods will not be straightforward.

While constitutive goods, as Taylor understands them, might be understood to underlie our ordinary life choice as well as our moral reactions, this cannot mean that our moral reactions are just of a piece with our life choices. Moreover, while our
constitutive goods might indeed inform our life choices, this does not necessarily mean that we can work meaningfully back from our life goods towards a clear comprehension of our constitutive goods. It would seem that Taylor’s notion of the constitutive good is somewhat vague, and indeed this may be his intention. However, if we are to understand the self as actively engaged with the meaningful content of its moral reactions in a non-deliberative sense, such that this active sense of the self is internal to the notion of the moral reaction, then we will need a clearer formulation than is offered by Taylor’s account. To this end, we might refine the definition of the constitutive good on Taylor’s behalf: we could say that it is a good to which the self stands in a constitutive relation. Formulated as such, it more clearly apprehends the point in question.

3.9. Being moral, being a self.

Our pre-philosophical task, as we have seen, is to articulate the meaningful content of our moral reactions. We have also seen that to be a self is to seek and find an orientation with respect to the good. To articulate the meaningful content of our moral reactions, therefore, is something we can understand as essentially part of being a self, indeed essentially part of what it is to be a self. But it is clear that this is not something we self-consciously pursue: we actively pursue our life goods, not our moral reactions. To engage with the latter is neither a purely passive experience, nor something the self undertakes self-consciously. It is to engage with the goods implicit in our moral reactions, thus to engage with the goods with which we are already engaged to the extent that it is these for which there obtains a constitutive relation between self and good.

It is clear that to engage the constitutive relation between self and good is not a self-conscious undertaking. But we must nevertheless understand it in some active sense: it is in virtue of this relation that moral orientation is, as we have seen, a process of shaping both self and good. It is also clear that this cannot be understood to be an active process in the simple sense of being something which is self-consciously deliberative: the constitutive relation is a matter of self-description and its corresponding appreciation of the good, however self-description is not something which we self-consciously set out to attain. Rather, the constitutive relation between
the self and the good must be understood in terms of that which enables our appreciation of the good, thus in terms of the enabling conditions\textsuperscript{216} for our appreciation of the good (and thus for our being ethical).

We begin to discern a distinction which Taylor recognises but does not fully articulate. It is a distinction between two senses in which the self can be understood as active: as inherently part of selfhood, and that which the self self-consciously pursues. We have seen that to be a self is to seek and find an orientation with respect to the good, and it is in this sense that we can understand the self as active in a way that is inherently part of selfhood: the constitutive relation is something the self has always already engaged, yet something it must engage nevertheless. Thus, to the extent that our encounter with the goods with respect to which we orientate ourselves is a question that is always already there, we are always already situated within the moral ontology, yet we must continually situate ourselves within it nevertheless. We could say that we are tasked with being that which we already are: that is, we are tasked with being a self.\textsuperscript{217} It is a ‘transcendental’ question as to how we are so tasked; it is a question which Taylor touches upon, but does not fully articulate.

It is a substantial question as to how we might understand what it means to be tasked with being a self, and this question is more fully explored in Chapter Five of this study. For the time being we may note that our task of articulation has two facets: to articulate the goods implicit in our moral reactions, and to articulate our own self-understanding. It is a point which returns us to our original question of whether the SEE might be among those goods which are integrally part of the meaningful content of our moral reactions: should it be so, then our task of articulating it as such would ultimately be an immanent task of articulation. That is, it could only be in terms of the constitutive relation between the self and the good that we could understand its being so. The task of articulating the SEE as such a good, should it be possible, could not be separated from the task of articulating the self. As such, it could only be integrally part of the task of being a self.

\textsuperscript{216} It is a Kantian notion that there are conditions which enable empirical inquiry. It is by generalising the Kantian notion that we raise the question of the conditions which enable any form of meaningfully self-directed undertaking. Christensen, C.B. (unpublished material).

\textsuperscript{217} The idea of being tasked with being a self is developed by Kierkegaard (\textit{Sickness Unto Death}, page 29 and passim.) and Heidegger (\textit{Being and Time}, page 68). The extent of Heidegger’s debt to Kierkegaard on this point is open to interpretation.
3.10. Articulating an irresolute self.

Should it be something we could coherently understand as integrally part of the meaningful content of our moral reactions, the SEE would also be integrally part of the task of being a self. That task would be to respond to the demand internal to the moral reaction to make sense of that reaction, and to integrate the SEE as part of the self’s understanding of itself. While we have not established that the SEE is such a good, it is apparent that its being so would present a new challenge to the self being able to understand itself coherently. The challenge would be that the self would have to integrate two senses of the SEE: that in which it is among those goods with respect to which it orientates itself as a moral being, and that in which it consists in an instrumental valuing of the ecological entity. It is not clear that these two senses of the SEE could be reconciled.

We must consider the possibility that two incompatible senses of the SEE might each be integrally part of the self’s being the self that it is, and that it may not be able to reconcile these. It would be a challenge which it could not avoid: should the SEE be among those goods with respect to which it orientates itself as a moral agent, then it would be integrally part of a moral ontology to which the self inescapably assents. Acknowledging the SEE of the kind which consists in an instrumental valuing of the ecological entity would also be inescapable, however not in the same sense: the self is bound to assuming a stance of instrumental valuing, this being necessitated by its basic material and bodily needs which require that the entity be exploited as a natural resource. We might find in the ecological entity both a natural resource as well as that which we would articulate as a moral source; should this be so, the entity would represent both ‘beauty and commodity.’ This maxim is Emerson’s: writing in 1836, he noted that ‘it is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the woodcutter from the tree of the poet.’

The challenge which the self may potentially confront is one of self-articulation or self-description, which, as we have seen, is that which enables its appreciation of the

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good. It is a potential dilemma which would be internal to its relationship with the ecological entity, and as such independent of anything which could be attributed to the ecological entity *per se*. It could only beg the question of whether there are ecological entities with a more than instrumental significance to claim that ecological entities might be subdivided into two classes, those that are natural resources and those that instantiate the SEE in such a way that the self might find therein the moral sources that would empower its being moral. Quite apart from the obvious problem that there could be no agreement as to which entities belong in which class, the real failing of any such attempted reconciliation is that it could do nothing more than to reiterate the inherent risk of circularity confronting an ecological ethic. To pursue this line of reasoning cannot amount to anything other than a reiteration of the issues investigated in Chapter One of this study. It is in its experience of potentially *any* ecological entity at all that the self might encounter the problem of reconciling two senses of the SEE.

Should it confront the problem of irreconcilable senses of the SEE, the self could not be construed as the tragic hero: the dilemma it would face is of a different kind. It would not be an instance of the self’s finding itself divided between rival goods which would each claim its allegiance: it would not be a conflict between two goods which the self ought to respect. Rather, it would be a matter of physical necessity that the self could not avoid taking an instrumentalist stance towards an entity which it might perceive as something it ought to respect.

Should there be a non-instrumental sense of the SEE, then there is a problem of self-articulation or self-description which the self must confront. It is a problem which it could not avoid, short of eliminating the instrumentalist stance altogether, perhaps by adhering to Porphyry’s injunction, ‘who would restrict the diet of such men as hope to perfect themselves to those fruits which plants do not need for reproduction.’ To the extent that it is inextricably complicit in extractive and exploitative practices, the self is ultimately compelled to reflect disdainfully upon itself. This may simply be

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220 Mining and agriculture are two examples.
an inevitability which we must accept, as Murdoch suggests: ‘The self is a divided thing and the whole of it cannot be redeemed any more than it can be known.’

Should there be a non-instrumental sense of the SEE which the self might apprehend in its moral reactions, then it would seem that it must be condemned to act in bad faith every time it acts in a way which is either directly or indirectly exploitative of the ecological entity. It would be to act in a way that does not accord with its understanding of itself, whereby its appreciation of the SEE *qua* non-instrumental valuing would be enabled. To the extent that it might be unable to reconcile this inner conflict, such a self is one we might understand as in some sense *irresolute*. The key point is that to consider the possibility that the SEE might be integrally part of the meaningful content of our moral reactions is necessarily to consider the possibility that the question of this irresoluteness will arise. Should this inner conflict in fact obtain, its acceptance or resolution would be something we should seek to understand as integrally part of the task of selfhood.

3.11. Augustine’s doctrine of the two loves.

The problem of the irresolute self is a hypothetical one: we have not established that the SEE is in fact integrally part of our moral reactions. Nevertheless, this problem can be considered in analogy to the Augustinian doctrine of the two directions of the soul, usually expressed in terms of the two loves:

‘Augustine …sees the soul as potentially facing two ways, towards the higher and immaterial, or towards the lower and sensible. And these two directions of attention are also two directions of desire.’

These we might regard as analogous, respectively, to the SEE which would be the meaningful content of our moral reactions, and the SEE of the kind which consists in an instrumental valuing of the ecological entity. We might understand the Augustinian soul as analogous to the self for whom the ecological entity would represent both ‘beauty and commodity.’

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221 Murdoch, 1997: page 382.
Augustine’s doctrine of the two loves is an account of moral agency: it is the anti-
Platonic one that our being moral is not simply a matter of our desire for the good
being a function of how much we see it. Instead, we have the capacity to see the good
and yet fail to act in accordance with the claim it makes upon us. For Augustine, a
lack of insight into the good cannot explain this perversity of the will; the latter stems
from ‘the soul’s sense of itself’, causing us to ‘act below and against our insight.’

‘For the linear theories which descend from Socrates, as well as for modern
rationalists, the phenomenon of weakness of the will – ‘akrasia’ – is a major
intellectual problem; for Augustine, it was no problem, but rather the central
crisis of moral experience.’

For Augustine, it is the human soul which aspires to integrate a higher good as part of
its self-understanding, but which is compelled nevertheless to act against this higher
good due to its being the human creature that it is. Central to Augustine’s notion of
moral agency is ‘the soul’s sense of itself’, to which he attributes the source of the
perversity of the will as well as its only hope of salvation. Attaining the latter is a
task to which he directs us. To this end he enjoins us: ‘Return within yourself. In the
inward man dwells truth.’

Augustine’s account is of a human soul that can be understood only in terms of its
relationship to God, the details of which are not our concern here. The relevance of
his account lies in its presenting moral agency in terms of an inherent dividedness
of the soul (or perhaps the self), such that it is in its ability to respond to this
dividedness that its moral agency consists. It is essential to his account that the soul
can and must respond to this dividedness. The prior point is that division is necessary
for morality. The salient Augustinian point is that this dividedness is not merely a
contingent matter, but is instead part of the soul’s being the human soul that it is, and
moral deliberation must be understood in terms of this dividedness as the capacity to
recognise and respond to it as integrally part of self-understanding. To do so must be
a task for any self that understands itself, or seeks to do so, in terms of some
conception of the good.

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Augustine’s account of moral agency offers us some insight into how we might understand the task of selfhood. Where Augustine’s is an account of the soul’s salvation, we might interpret it in terms of the self-integration which is the task of selfhood, thus in terms of the self-articulation which is integrally part of this task. While for Augustine it is the soul’s sense of itself that accounts for both the perversity of the will as well as its capacity to open itself to the possibility of its own salvation, we can reformulate this in terms of the self-description which would enable our appreciation of the good, and the lack thereof that would preclude it. Thus, it is self-description that enables our being moral, and its lack which would obstruct it. Augustine’s injunction to return within oneself can be interpreted as a call to engage self-understanding as a task, perhaps in some way reflexively, however not in a deliberate way, as if attaining to greater self-awareness were an explicit goal, because pre-philosophically this is never our goal. Rather, the task of selfhood is something we need to understand in terms of self-integration, whereby the constitutive relation between the self and the good is meaningfully engaged.

3.12. Integrating the good, integrating selfhood.

Whether or not it might be irresolute with respect to the ecological entity, the self is something we need to understand in terms of the task of selfhood. This task is, as we have seen, to respond to the demand internal to our moral reactions that we make sense of them by articulating their meaningful content. It is a task of responding to those goods which, in Taylor’s terms, we experience as incomparable or incontestable, thus as commanding our respect. It is to meaningfully engage those goods with which at some level we are already meaningfully engaged: these are our constitutive goods, being those in which a constitutive relation between the self and the good obtains. These are the goods in terms of which we understand ourselves, and our task of selfhood is ultimately to become most fully the self that we are. But this is not a task for which there can be a foreordained path: it remains an open question, both pre-philosophically as well as a philosophically, as to how this task should be undertaken.
Being something which might be interpreted in different ways, the task of selfhood is not something which will unfold according to a predetermined pattern. It cannot be understood in terms of any progressive stages of maturity or psychological development. Rather, this task is a matter of the self actively and reflectively relating itself to a good in terms of which it understands itself. Different selves will articulate this relationship differently, and as philosophers, we may recognise different forms of this active engagement. For Augustine, it is on the basis of understanding oneself in relation to God that the task of salvation is a meaningful one. The modern self for whom the task of salvation may not be a meaningful one must be tasked with relating itself to some other conception of the good. One such might perhaps be some notion of an ecological good, such that the task of selfhood might be meaningful in terms of an aspiration to realise the ‘ecological self.’ This point is explored in Chapter Four; whether or not it is a coherent conception of the self remains in question. The salient point at this juncture is that there is no foreordained path to realising the task of selfhood.

To engage the task of selfhood must surely amount to more than the demand to be clear about the content of this or that moral reaction: the goods implicit in these reactions, as we have seen, are integrally part of a structured totality of goods. We have already seen that ‘we feel the demand to be consistent in our moral reactions,’ and part of the need to make sense of them is surely the need to do so consistently. We can see that this task, whatever it may mean for the individual self, is one for which consistency or self-coherence is internally part of that task. And this is surely not something which is simply given: it must be something we must work towards. Thus, we could say that to be tasked with being a self is to be tasked with self-integration. Indeed, we have already seen that our task of articulating the meaningful content of our moral reactions is an immanent task of articulation: to articulate the goods implicit in our moral reactions, and to articulate our own self-understanding, are two facets of the same task.

To relate oneself coherently and consistently to some conception of the good is not, however, a guaranteed or foreordained outcome. We have seen two illustrations of the possibility that this may be challenged, or perhaps confounded: the human soul divided between its two loves as Augustine describes it, and the self which is
irresolute with respect to the ecological entity. While the latter remains hypothetical, we can nevertheless regard these as instances of the more general point that self-integration is something that must be attained, not something that can be assumed from the outset. In whichever way we might understand our task of becoming most fully the selves that we are, to relate ourselves fully and unconditionally to some conception of the good is our destination, not our starting point.

The self is something we must recognise as having an inherent tendency to be divided or irresolute or otherwise challenged in the task of integrating its values and needs and desires as part of its understanding of itself. And it is something which the self must recognise for itself. For Augustine, the soul’s only possibility for salvation consists in a capacity to recognise and respond to its being divided between its two loves. Pitched in the more general terms of the self and its task of selfhood, we could say that a capacity to recognise and respond to its lack of self-integration is for any self that in which its task of selfhood consists.


We have already seen that the task of articulating the meaningful content of moral reactions is not a task with a guaranteed outcome: we may struggle to articulate what we experience. Taylor observes that we may have ‘an inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance,’ and that in our attempts to articulate the goods apprehended therein, we may be ‘forced back …to the inarticulate limit from which they originate.’ For Taylor therefore, articulating the meaningful content of our moral reactions is something which we must work at continually, always reinterpreting the goods in terms of which we understand ourselves as new situations and moral dilemmas arise. Indeed, it is this continual process of reinterpretation which is the ongoing process of moral orientation. Moreover, Taylor acknowledges the possibility that there may be inherent challenges in the process of our making sense of our moral reactions. As we have seen, our accepted beliefs may be challenged. Taylor postulates that there may be a ‘lack of fit’ between what we ‘consciously believe’ and the conceptual resources we need in order to make sense of our moral reactions.

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Taylor acknowledges the possibility that the self may struggle in its task of making sense of the meaningful content of its moral reactions, accounting for this in terms of his key notion of a constitutive relation between self and good. As we have seen, it is self-description which enables an appreciation of the good. An inability to appreciate or articulate some conception of the good would entail an inability to relate oneself meaningfully to that good, and this can be attributed to a lack of self-description or self-understanding or self-awareness. The notion of a constitutive relation between self and good builds upon Taylor’s notion of the ‘strong evaluator,’ which he contrasts with the ‘simple weigher of alternatives,’ the former having a ‘vocabulary of worth’ which the latter lacks. But the notion of the constitutive relation allows us to see that the notion of the strong evaluator does not adequately describe the self: there are degrees to which one might be the strong evaluator, since there are degrees to which one may possess a vocabulary of worth. Thus, the self may be the strong evaluator and yet still lack the evaluative awareness and the conceptual resources to articulate some of its moral sources; it may be the strong evaluator and yet still struggle in its task of making sense of the meaningful content of its moral reactions.

For Taylor, the process of moral orientation must be understood as an endlessly self-reflective process. There is no final or complete ‘vocabulary of worth’ which we might acquire or to which we might attain: it is not something which is ever static or fixed. On Taylor’s behalf, we can interpret the vocabulary of worth as something which naturally grows or expands or evolves, such that the self becomes more articulate as it articulates the good in its ongoing process of moral orientation. We can see that articulacy is for Taylor open-ended: through the process of moral orientation, the self gains greater articulacy and thus expands its vocabulary of worth, potentially doing so indefinitely. The struggle to articulate the meaningful content of its moral reactions, a struggle which potentially any self may face, is one which is overcome by gaining greater articulacy.

Taylor’s account provides us with the means to understand the moral reaction as inherently meaningful to the extent that the self feels the need to make sense of its

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meaningful content and to do so consistently. While Taylor accommodates the possibility that that this meaningful content may be elusive to articulation in the terms which the self has at its grasp, he offers no suggestion that this inarticulacy is anything other than the need to engage the normal process of moral orientation. It is, therefore, assumed to be an inarticulacy which can always be overcome. Moreover, the self which engages the process of moral orientation, confronting therein its own inarticulacy, is any self, and potentially every self: there is no suggestion of anything particular about the self which might be the basis for its inarticulacy, nor any suggestion of anything that might in any way limit its capacity to overcome it. The self, it would seem, has an endless capacity to understand itself anew. In Taylor’s words, we are ‘self-interpreting animals.’

Taylor’s account provides for a self which is endlessly open to reinterpretation and which has an endless capacity to overcome any inarticulacy which might obstruct its task of making sense of its moral reactions. Such an obstruction, should it arise, is only ever a contingent matter. By the same token, the self which is the self-interpreting animal is not bound to articulate any particular conception of the good. Indeed, we have seen that this is the advantage of Taylor’s account of the self over the ‘thick’ Kantian self, which latter was laden with content. While there need be no suggestion that we should again invoke the thick Kantian self at this juncture, we can consider the possibility that Taylor’s account of the self is perhaps too unconstrained in its ability to reinterpret itself. The possibility we might consider, which Taylor does not, is that the reasons for the self’s inarticulacy in making sense of its moral reactions might not be a purely contingent matter, but might instead be inherently part of the self’s being the self that it is. Taylor does not fully explore the implications of the fact that the self is only ever finite (or indeed human), and is therefore never without its limitations.


We seek to understand the self in terms of the task of selfhood, and the need to do so suggests the need to build upon, or perhaps move beyond Taylor’s account of the self.

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The self for Taylor is endlessly self-interpreting, responding to the demand internal to its moral reactions that it make sense of them by articulating their meaningful content. While Taylor allows for the possibility that the self may be challenged in this endeavour, perhaps in such a way that its understanding of itself is challenged, he does not address the question of how this inarticulacy might arise. Moreover, he does not address the question of whether understanding this inarticulacy might be essential to understanding the task of selfhood. The interesting possibility which he does not consider is that these limitations are inherently part of the self’s being the self that it is, such that recognising and responding to these limitations might be understood as integrally part of the task of selfhood.

We have already seen that limitations or divisions may be integrally part of the self’s being the self that it is, and that to recognise and respond to these is integrally part of the task of selfhood. Thus, for Augustine it is a human soul that must reconcile the fact of its being divided between its two loves. And we may hypothesise that any self will be similarly confronted with its own limitations, one such perhaps being the self for whom the need it feels to integrate the SEE as part of the meaningful content of its moral reactions must be reconciled with its inevitable need to participate in the ongoing exploitation of the ecological entity. In each of these cases as in any case, it is an ordinary finite self that must confront the task of selfhood. By so doing, it is inevitable that it must confront its own limitations.

In seeking to understand the self as being tasked with recognising and responding to its own inherent limitations, we need not be beholden to any particular account such as Augustine’s. We need only see that the self which is so tasked is a self with a biography, and that its responding to the need it feels to make sense of the meaningful content of its moral reactions cannot but reflect this biography. It can only respond as the self that it is: it is only in virtue of the need to understand itself coherently that it feels compelled to make sense of its moral reactions, and to do so consistently. We have already seen that the task of articulating the meaningful content of our moral reactions is an immanent task of articulation: it is the task of articulating those goods in terms of which we understand ourselves. We can now see that there is a need to do so consistently or coherently, and that it is biography that makes this possible: much more than merely a chronology of events in a lifetime, biography is our capacity for
coherent self-understanding. Biography can be understood as the ongoing self-reflection in which narratives are interwoven in such a way that their coherence is assumed. It is only against a background of coherent self-understanding that the self might recognise and respond to its own inherent limitations or divisions.

It is in virtue of its capacity to recognise and respond to its own inherent limitations or divisions that the self must have some capacity to change and develop. This must be integrally part of the process of moral orientation, and while Taylor does not explore this aspect of moral orientation, we can see that it is accommodated by his notion of self-understanding as internal to the constitutive relation between self and good. Thus, while it is never our pre-philosophical intention to attain to higher degrees of self-understanding, this does not entail that any degree of self-understanding is something predetermined or given, to which we are bound as if it were some attribute like the colour of our eyes. The self is never finally beholden to any degree of self-understanding. The self must be mutable, however not in the sense of being fickle or inconstant: it must have a capacity to change and develop consistently, and in such a way that it might come to understand itself and its constitutive goods in a new, revised light. But it is only against a background of coherent self-understanding that this could be possible, since it is only against such a background that the renewed understanding could be recognised for what it is.

Biography proves to be the means to grasp the background coherence against which the task of selfhood is meaningful, and therefore possible. It is only against a background of coherence that any notion of change and development is meaningful. And any such change or development is integrated into the biography, enabling further change to build upon it. Thus, ‘a self always has a personal history, a biography, in which it develops and changes as and into the self that it is.’ The self’s changing and developing is through recognising and responding to its own inherent limitations, and this must surely be informed by the way it understands itself. The ultimate limitation is that the self is unable to step outside of itself: in responding to the demand to make sense of its moral reactions, it must respond from within itself.

\[\text{Christensen, C.B. (unpublished material).}\]
We can now see that in order to fully understand the constitutive relation between the self and the good, it is necessary to understand the self as being both inherently conservative and inherently dynamic. The dynamic aspect is that self-description or self-understanding, or what we might call descriptive self-awareness, is necessarily always directed towards greater refinement or clarification. This, however, is only ever meaningful against a background of coherent and consistent self-understanding, such that the self only ever responds from within itself, as the self that it is. It is only this background of inherent conservatism that enables the dynamic aspect, since it is only against this background that the latter is meaningful. This tension between the conservative and dynamic aspects of selfhood is one we have already seen: tasked with being a self, we are tasked with being that which we already are. Thus, the constitutive relation is something the self has always already engaged, yet something it must engage nevertheless. In other words, we are always already situated within the moral ontology, yet we must continually situate ourselves within it nevertheless.

By understanding the self as both inherently conservative and inherently dynamic, we are able to build upon Taylor’s account of the self. In particular, we are able to account for the self as recognising and responding to the limitations which are inherently part of its being the self that it is, and in such a way that its so doing might be understood as integrally part of the task of selfhood. We can now see that the self confronts these limitations in those situations where its grasp of the meaningful content of its moral reactions may be only weak or partial. The conservative and dynamic aspects of selfhood are respectively those in which the self is constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values, and that in which it is never finally beholden to any particular constellation of such engagements. To recognise and respond to its weak or partial grasp of the goods it apprehends is something we need to understand as integral to the task of selfhood. Exactly what this task entails is something we have yet to establish. It is clear, however, that this is a question which Taylor’s account does not fully address.

3.15. Selfhood as an issue.

Our initial question was whether we might understand the SEE as being among those goods with respect to which we orientate ourselves as moral agents making ordinary
moral judgements. Elaborating upon Taylor’s account of the self, this question was reformulated as that of whether we might understand the SEE to be integrally part of the meaningful content of our moral reactions. Its being so would entail that our task of articulating it as such a good would be an *immanent* task of articulation, whereby our task of articulating the SEE could not be separated from the task of articulating the self. In other words, its being so would entail that it would be among those goods that are integral to the self’s understanding of itself, and therefore integrally part of its task of being a self. These are the substantial implications of the SEE being among those goods for which there obtains a constitutive relation between self and good. Whether or not the SEE can indeed be understood as such a good, however, remains in question.

Having begun to elaborate the implications of Taylor’s thesis that there is a constitutive relation between self and good, we have seen the need to conceive of this relation in a sense which is more dynamic than is implied by Taylor’s account. We can now see that the self which is constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values is by definition one which can never claim to fully or finally understand itself: there must always be the possibility that there will be goods of which the self has only a weak or partial grasp, these being goods in terms of which it must seek to understand itself nevertheless. Such goods would be integrally part of the self’s understanding of itself, while at the same time requiring that the self reappraise its own self-understanding. The self is challenged to integrate an understanding of the good, and by so doing to reappraise its understanding of itself. We can therefore see that rather than being constant or static in the way in which it engages its goods and values, the self must have the capacity to change and develop the manner in which it is so engaged. A capacity to change and develop must be integrally part of the self’s being the self that it is, where this is the capacity to recognise and respond to its own inherent limitations.

Our initial concern in elaborating Taylor’s account was the notion of a constitutive relation between the self and the good. But we can now see that the interesting dimension of this relation, which Taylor does not fully elaborate, is that in which self-understanding is challenged. As we have seen, Taylor asserts that ‘we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation
But the assumption would seem to be that an orientation with respect to the good can always be found. His account does not draw out the implications of those instances in which such an orientation cannot easily be found.

The need to understand the self as recognising and responding to its own limitations is the need to build upon Taylor’s account of the self. The emphasis of our inquiry shifts accordingly: rather than being concerned with selfhood as being somehow given, the interesting dimension is that in which selfhood is an issue. Rather than the self which clearly and unequivocally engages its constitutive goods, we are now concerned with the self which is tasked with being a self, a self which is always already engaged with goods of which it may in some instances have only a weak or partial grasp. Our question is whether those goods of which the self may have only a weak or partial grasp may be integrally part of the task of selfhood. Specifically, our question is whether the SEE might be such a good.

We may postulate that selfhood may become an issue for the self as it engages its ongoing task of moral orientation. Moreover, we may postulate that this issue would arise in instances where the self has only a weak or partial grasp of the good: the self would confront its limitations in those instances in which its ability to understand itself in relation to some conception of the good is challenged. We might also postulate that the SEE may be such a good. Should this be the case, the self might find itself divided or irresolute, as we have seen. But more to the point is that in seeking to orientate itself with respect to this good, its self-understanding would be challenged: in seeking an orientation with respect to this good, it is not just the good which would be an issue, but also its understanding of itself. It is incumbent upon the self for whom the ecological entity represents both ‘beauty and commodity’ to reappraise its understanding of itself.


Integrally part of the task of selfhood, the task of recognising and responding to the fact that it may have only a weak or partial grasp of certain goods is a task for any self at all. This task, therefore, is not one of overcoming a deficiency. Rather, it is a recognition of the fact that the self is only ever approaching a clearer understanding of
itself. Indeed, we have already seen that this inherent directedness towards self-understanding has in some sense been assumed by both Taylor and MacIntyre: each accommodates the possibility that the self may come to a clearer grasp of its goods and values, where that grasp might initially be tenuous or partial or weak. However, they accommodate this possibility in different ways.

We have seen that MacIntyre’s account of the self gives central importance to the possibility, and indeed the inevitability, of a there being historical dimension to the way in which it reflectively engages its goods and values. The self for MacIntyre is a creature of history: it finds itself ‘part of a history,’ and whether it recognises it or not, ‘one of the bearers of a tradition.’ By conceiving of tradition as inherently dynamic, MacIntyre emphasises that the self is always engaged in an active and reflective reappraisal of the goods upon which that tradition is centred, such that to belong to that tradition is to participate in this reappraisal. For MacIntyre, this reappraisal is meaningful, and therefore possible, only in virtue of the self’s immersion in history and tradition. In other words, it is only due to the self’s situatedness being a matter of history and tradition that its reappraisal of itself is enabled, and also required. It is only this reappraisal that might deliver us to a clearer apprehension of the good.

Taylor’s account of the self has little to say about the self’s immersion in history and tradition, and therefore little to say about the reappraisal of a historically situated understanding of the good. Nevertheless, we have seen that Taylor’s account of the self is richer than MacIntyre’s in an important respect, namely that it is not tied to the notion of practices nor of excellences, thus accommodating the notion of the self being constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values. Furthermore, for the self whose appreciation of the good is not dependent upon participation in any particular practice, there is the possibility that the good with respect to which it orientates itself may be to some degree inchoate. For Taylor, such a good is irreducible to the purely conceptual, and would be the meaningful content of those evaluations which can be expressed only through metaphor. The self’s grasp of the

233 MacIntyre, 2002: page 221.
good is perhaps initially tenuous; a clearer grasp of the good will come, however, with a clearer or more refined self-understanding.

We need not reiterate the exercise of comparing and contrasting the accounts of Taylor and MacIntyre. But we might nevertheless take up MacIntyre’s point that the self is never purely ahistorical. We might consider the possibility, which Taylor does not, that there is a historical dimension to the self’s engagement with its goods and values. Being any self whose understanding of itself is to some extent shaped by its own history as well as its historical circumstances, the key point is that its ability to appreciate the good is therefore also shaped to some extent by this history. We could say that its ability to appreciate or grasp the good, never purely ahistorical, is only ever possible within its historical horizons. The self is a creature of history, and its understanding of the good, enabled by its understanding of itself and perhaps in some instances only weak or partial, must also have a historical dimension. If we accept this possibility, then we might postulate that there is a historical dimension to the task of selfhood.

We have yet to establish just how the task of selfhood should be understood. To do so is our philosophical task, and part of this task is to explore the possibility that the SEE might be integrally part of the task of selfhood. Should this be so, and should there be a historical dimension to the task of selfhood, then we might postulate that a clearer understanding of this historical dimension might entail a clearer understanding of the SEE. More specifically, we might postulate that our understanding of ourselves, to some extent inevitably a creature of history, has not enabled or indeed has obscured a full understanding of the SEE. Several contemporary accounts have sought to explore this possibility, thus to explore the possibility that a redintegrated relationship with the ecological entity will ensue from a fuller understanding of ourselves. An examination of these accounts is the task to which we now turn.
4. Examining the possibility of ‘the ecological self.’

4.1. Introduction.

This chapter takes up the question of whether the self might be understood as tasked with attaining, or perhaps being inherently directed towards, a more integrated relationship with the ecological entity. To this end, contemporary accounts of the ecological self are explored. These accounts attribute general systemic ecological degradation to a general self-understanding that has become systemically distorted or restricted. To recognise and respond to this distortion is seen to be integrally part of the task of attaining to the fullest potential of selfhood, this being prerequisite to establishing a less destructive relationship with the ecological entity. However, by interpreting the task of selfhood as an active engagement of the constitutive relation that obtains between self and good, we find that this task cannot be understood in terms of realising the ecological self, and the latter is discounted as a spurious notion.


Our inquiry into the possibility that there may be a moral dimension to our relationship with the ecological entity has progressed to the point where this has become a question of the constitution of the self. We have seen that to understand the self in a substantial and meaningful sense is to understand it as being constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values. These are many and various, and there are many and various ways in which they are engaged. Among these multifarious ways of valuing, however, is the substantial sense which is the basis for our being moral, and it is this which we have sought in this study to understand. This is strong evaluation, and it is this sense of valuing wherein the self is most fully engaged: the goods apprehended therein are our constitutive goods. Being those goods which we find most difficult to articulate, our constitutive goods are those for which articulation comes closest to self-articulation. It is these which we apprehend as the meaningful content of our moral reactions, and our question is whether the significance of the
ecological entity (the SEE) might be understood as integrally part of this meaningful content. Should it be so, the task of articulating the SEE would be integrally part of the task of making sense of this meaningful content, and therefore integrally part of the task of selfhood.

Our preliminary sketch of the task of selfhood has put forward the possibility that it is one of recognising and responding to the limitations that are integrally part of the self’s understanding of itself. We have postulated, moreover, that these limitations may to some degree be the product of historical or cultural influence, and that to recognise and respond to them is to understand them for what they are. The clearer or more refined self-understanding thus attained would enable a clearer appreciation of the good. We have postulated, but by no means established, that this clearer understanding of our constitutive goods might entail a clearer understanding of the SEE. The proposal is that the self for whom the ecological entity represents both ‘beauty and commodity’ might perhaps, through attaining a clearer understanding of itself, have a basis from which it might work towards redintegrating its relationship with the ecological entity.

The possibility that our relationship with the ecological entity might have become distorted or restricted by a restricted understanding of ourselves is one which is put forward in the contemporary eco-philosophical literature. Thus, it is proposed that attaining to a fuller understanding of ourselves is the means by which we might establish a less destructive relationship with the ecological entity. Selfhood is thus understood as a task or goal or telos, being something to which we must attain either as individuals or collectively as a culture. The assumption is that the self can be understood teleologically: that is, as inherently purposeful, or otherwise inherently directed towards realising the optimal state of the system (ultimately the ecosystem) of which it is a part.

A second strand of eco-philosophy is based upon the notion that selfhood might be understood as a task, or otherwise in terms of its telos. This strand can be discerned as being distinct from that which addresses the question of intrinsic value, which we have already considered. As Chapter One has shown, the ‘intrinsic value strand’ addresses the question of how the ecological entity might be conceived or indeed
reconceived in such a way that it might be afforded normative status and thereby included within our sphere of moral concern. The second strand can be dubbed the ‘ecological self strand’, being that which addresses the question of how the self might be conceived as being inherently directed or otherwise naturally inclined towards recognising the ecological entity as commanding and deserving respect. The self as such would be an ideal, standing in contrast to the self whose relationship with the ecological entity is not what it could or should be. The latter is the self whose natural inclination towards the ecological entity has become distorted or biased or occluded. By thus putting forward the notion of an idealised self, this strand of the debate raises the question not only of our relationship with the ecological entity, but now also of our standing in comparison with an idealised ecological self.

The contemporary accounts which comprise the second strand of eco-philosophy can be interpreted as addressing the question of whether the SEE might be understood as integrally part of the moral orientation of the self, and therefore integrally part of the task of selfhood. While there are no accounts in this strand which formulate the problem in these terms, it can be interpreted as the problem which constitutes this strand of the debate. In their various ways, these accounts present selfhood as something which can and should be realised in a form more balanced or integrated than that which currently informs our exploitative practice with regard to the ecological entity. Whether or not this constitutes a valid interpretation of the task of selfhood is the question we now examine.

4.3. Postulating ‘the ecological self.’

While the concept of ‘the ecological self’ has only infrequently been designated and elaborated as such, we can nevertheless understand it as a conception of an idealised self that has been implicit in much of the contemporary eco-philosophical literature. The ‘ecological self strand’ is thus characterised by the way it puts the very notion of the self in question, rather than simply assuming it. In this regard, this strand differs from the ‘intrinsic value’ strand, which does not question the notion of the self. Avoiding the reductive consideration of the ecological entity which characterises the latter strand, the ecological self strand is primarily concerned to understand the entity in terms of its interrelationship with the self. This interrelationship is examined in
different ways by different writers. Nevertheless, the ecological self is a notion which can be interpreted to be either explicit or implicit in the various accounts which put the notion of the self in question.

The ecological self strand works from the thesis that the self possesses an inherent directedness towards respecting the ecological entity which can be, and is in reality occluded by a self-understanding which is in some way limiting or flawed or incomplete. Different accounts of the ecological self hold to different views of what this limitation or ‘flaw’ might actually be: while some accounts hold that it is a self-understanding which is simply too narrow, others contend that it is a self-understanding that has been structurally biased or indeed perverted by modern culture. As such, the ecological self can be generalised as a conception that is intended to counterpoise the self whose self-understanding has become distorted with the result that its practices are ecologically destructive, or alternatively, has yet to realise its inherent potential to live in a way which minimises its impact upon the natural environment. Either way, the notion of the ecological self is intended as a preceptive notion designed to encourage us to draw comparisons between the ecological self and ourselves. Thus, the ecological self is an ideal to which we may or may not ‘measure up.’

We can understand the ecological self as a descriptive account of an idealised self in which the prescriptive is implicit: an imperative to discover or rediscover the ‘true self’ is internal to a description of the modern self as one whose natural inclination towards respecting the ecological entity is latent or has been occluded or forgotten. This combination of the descriptive and the prescriptive is thus just as characteristic of the ‘ecological self’ strand as of the ‘intrinsic value’ strand of ecophilosophy, although in neither strand is it explicitly acknowledged. For both strands, the descriptive account (respectively of the ecological entity and the ecological self) is intended to imply an ought, however it need not be the same ought that is implied in both strands. While the intrinsic value strand can be generalised as attempting to establish the normative ought of obligation, the ecological self strand would seem to be implying an ought in a sense less formal than this. There is no appeal to the ought

234 As Chapter One demonstrated, a description of the ecological entity as intrinsically valuable is intended as one in which the prescriptive ‘ought’ is implicit or entailed.
of obligation, and the implication is that the ecological self is something which we ought to aspire to somehow attain, however not in a sense in which we would be obliged to do so. Rather, these accounts can be interpreted as being concerned with (and indeed relying upon) a sense of our natural inclinations, rather than any formal sense of the ought to which we could or should respond as moral agents.

It remains to be seen whether or not the accounts which comprise the ‘ecological self’ strand of ecophilosophy are able to account for the self as one which we might understand in relation to the ecological self. Indeed, their claim must be that the self must be so understood: to the extent that they appeal to our natural inclinations, their claim must be that the self should be internally related to the ecological self, such that being or becoming the ecological self is part of its being the self that it is. Implying the prescriptive as internally part of the prescriptive, these accounts would seem to assume that the ecological self is something which we ought to aspire to somehow attain. But it is not clear that this can be a meaningful aspiration, and whether or not this can be a plausible account of selfhood remains to be seen.

4.4. Pelagianism and the ecological self.

The question of our establishing a renewed or redintegrated relationship with the ecological entity is the thread that runs through each of the two strands of eco-philosophy. While the basis for our so doing is in each case different, in both cases the possibility of our so doing is assumed. But it cannot be assumed that a sound basis for this renewal has been provided. As Chapter One has shown, it is misguided to assume that we could conceptualise a new basis for our being ethical in our dealings with the ecological entity. Passmore observes that it is misguided to regard a morality as something we could ‘simply conjure up.’ Rather, it is something which ‘can only grow out of existing attitudes, …as an extension or development of them.’ Concurring with Passmore, we can now see that a renewed relationship with the ecological entity can only ensue from a renewed understanding of existing attitudes, and ultimately from a renewed understanding of ourselves. And it is establishing this latter which is the aim of the accounts which comprise ecological self

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235 Passmore, 1974: page 111.
strand of ecophilosophy. However, this does not necessarily mean that the ecological self is a meaningful aspiration.

Based upon the idea that our relationship with the ecological entity is shaped by the way that we understand ourselves, the ecological self is intended as a conception of the maximally reflective self which will naturally seek to mitigate its impact upon the natural systems of which it is a part. This idealised self is one for whom a more harmonious relationship with the ecological entity would naturally ensue from its greatly clarified self-understanding. This is the descriptive component of the notion. The prescriptive component is the implicit imperative to realise this maximally reflective self. But we can now see that this cannot be a meaningful imperative unless some sound basis for the ecological self is provided. Moreover, it is now clear that it can be a meaningful imperative only to the extent that we can understand the ecological self to be in some way integrally part of the task of selfhood. And to conceive of it as such is surely to conceive of how we might attain to it: it cannot be assumed that our simply choosing to attain to the ecological self can be a meaningful choice.

Passmore alerts us of the need to question the assumption that ‘simply by deciding to change their ways men can create a better world.’ This, he points out, expresses the Pelagian side of the Western tradition. Pelagius is noted for his view that ‘God has commanded men to be perfect, [and] would not have commanded them to do what lies beyond their powers.’ Pelagianism is therefore the view that it is within our powers to perfect ourselves. Passmore notes that this is an ‘anti-Augustinian thesis:’

‘Whereas …Pelagius called upon men to reform themselves by their own efforts, Augustine, convinced that this was impossible, sought in God’s grace the solution to the problem of how men could be saved.’

We have seen that for Augustine, the human soul is divided between its two loves, and that its moral agency consists in recognising and responding to this dividedness. A Pelagian conception of moral agency would be quite the opposite, such that simply

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236 Passmore, 1974: page 80 (emphasis in original).
237 Passmore, 1972: page 94.
deciding to attain to become the perfectly moral agent is sufficient to bring this about. It is the latter which Passmore identifies as having been a tendency in the Western tradition. Alerting us to this Pelagian tendency, he invites us to question it for ourselves.

It would be a mistake to regard Passmore as saying simply that Pelagianism has been a spurious influence and should therefore be discredited. It is not his intention to analyse its shortcomings, and nor does he provide an argument that expounds its failings or extols an alternative view of morality. Passmore is best interpreted as alerting us to the possibility that a limited conception of moral agency may be tacitly assumed by an account which argues that we must change our ways, or otherwise seek to attain to some idealised conception of selfhood. But his warning can be also interpreted as an invitation to critically examine the extent to which the idealised conception of selfhood in question is in fact a Pelagian conception. Such an examination is neglected by the accounts which constitute the intrinsic value strand of ecophilosophy: we can recognise a degree of Pelagianism to be at work in these accounts to the extent that our ability to conceptualise a new foundation for our being ethical is assumed. A recognition of the need to avoid such a limited conception of the self has perhaps motivated some of the accounts which constitute the ecological self strand of ecophilosophy. It remains to be seen, however, as to whether or not they succeed in so doing.

To the extent that they seek to examine rather than assume a conception of selfhood, the accounts which constitute the ecological self strand of ecophilosophy would at first glance appear to be an improvement upon the intrinsic value accounts. Their guiding premise is that a less destructive and exploitative relationship with the ecological entity is not something we can simply decide to assume, but is rather something which would emerge from our understanding a conceptual basis for the exploitative stance. To this end, they aim to explicate the ways in which a restricted or limiting conception of the self lies at the root of the exploitative stance. Ultimately, they can be understood to postulate causal links between the ecological crisis and the historical roots of our contemporary self-understanding. Implicit in them is the imperative to respond to in some way to this limitation. The pivotal question, however, is whether this recognition of, and response to our inherent
limitations can be understood to be integrally part of our being the selves that we are. To address this question is our philosophical task.

4.5. Identifying the roots of exploitative attitudes to nature.

Accounts of the ecological self can be loosely regarded to be the heirs of Lynn White’s influential paper of 1967. White’s innovation was to postulate a causal link between traditional and accepted conceptions of the self and its place in the world on the one hand, and ecological exploitation and degradation on the other hand. Thus, he asserts that the roots of exploitative and destructive attitudes towards nature can be traced to Christian anthropocentrism. As the instruments of exploitation, technology and science ‘cannot be understood historically apart from distinctive attitudes toward nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma.’ Furthermore, ‘we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.’

Different accounts of the ecological self can be interpreted as heirs to White. While not necessarily attributing ecological exploitation to Christian anthropocentrism, they follow White’s lead in postulating some particular historical basis for exploitative attitudes towards the natural world. Among the various strands of ecofeminism is one such account: thus, Merchant postulates that it was the transition from an organic to the mechanistic model of nature that permitted the justified exploitation of the earth.

‘The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature – the most far-reaching effect of the Scientific Revolution. Because nature was now viewed as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature.’

239 White, 1967.
241 Merchant, 1983.
Merchant’s is one among various accounts of ecofeminism, and one among several accounts of the way in which historically attitudes have shaped our relationship with the ecological entity.

Passmore concurs with White in acknowledging the influence of Christian anthropocentrism upon shaping our relationship with the ecological entity.

‘Christianity encouraged certain special attitudes to nature: that it exists primarily as a resource rather than as something to be contemplated with enjoyment, that man has the right to use it as he will, that it is not sacred, that man’s relationships with it are not governed by moral principles.’

However, while he concurs with White that conceptual roots of exploitative attitudes are to be found in Western traditions, Passmore views a historical account of these attitudes as merely the starting point for their philosophical reinterpretation. To identify the historical influence, or perhaps to merely postulate what it might be, is not sufficient. It is not sufficient to merely recognise the influence of these historical factors: in some way, we must also be able to respond.

In seeking to explore the concept of the ecological self and to determine whether it is a viable notion, we must be clear that our task is not that of the historian. We need to respond to that component to our conception of ourselves which is historically shaped, and our so doing must include our integrating this as part of our understanding of ourselves. It is nothing other than Pelagianism to assume that the influence of history and tradition can simply be cast aside once it has been identified, whereby ‘all the reformer has to do is think up a better moral or metaphysical outlook and then propagate it.’ Passmore argues that changes in moral outlook have occurred only where ‘they have been able to appeal to and further develop already existing traditions.’ Traditions have the potential to be ‘fruitfully discordant; internal diversity therein provides the resources for renewed understanding. Several contemporary accounts can be understood as seeking to establish the foundations for a more eco-centric self-understanding precisely by responding to this ‘fruitful discordance.’ We have yet to establish, however, whether or not such an approach

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243 Ecofeminism is discussed more fully later in the chapter.
244 Passmore, 1974: page 20 (emphasis in original).
246 Passmore, 1974: page 195.
engages our understanding of ourselves in such a way that it might be understood to be integrally part of the task of selfhood.


Deep ecology is among the contemporary accounts which aim to establish the foundations for a more eco-centric self-understanding. In the formal sense originally intended by Naess, deep ecology is a systematic method of explicating the presuppositions that underpin our attitudes towards the ecological entity by asking progressively deeper questions about our relationship with it. Its intention is that progressively deeper questioning will bring to light the self’s presuppositions and ontological commitments, thus explicating what has hitherto been implicit in the self’s attitudes and the practices these attitudes inform. Indeed, deep ecology assumes that questioning can be deep enough to bring to light the presuppositions fundamental to the self’s understanding of itself. The aim of deep ecology is that we explicate the self-understanding implicit in our attitudes to the ecological entity, thus arriving at what are variously called our ‘ultimate premises’ or ‘ultimate norms.’

Thus, ‘as we dig deeper into the premises of our thinking, we eventually stop. Those premises we stop at are our ultimates. When we philosophise, we all stop at different places. But we all use premises which, for us, are ultimate.’

Through such clarification of the basis for our attitudes towards the ecological entity, reflection upon these attitudes is facilitated.

Deep ecology is based upon a far stronger claim than the trivial one that reflection upon the basis for our actions allows for clearer decisions and policy-making. The strong claim is embedded in the terminology: the terms ‘ultimate premise’ and ‘ultimate norm’ are used interchangeably in the deep ecology literature, implying that when progressively deeper questioning comes to an end, the ultimate premises thus

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247 ‘Deep ecology’ is a term that is currently used pervasively for a variety of philosophical and quasi-philosophical positions that are loosely defined and of questionable merit. Thus it is necessary to explicate the formal sense of the term as Naess intended it.

248 Naess, 1993: page 207.

249 Naess, 1993: pages 205, 207.
arrived at should be understood as norms.\textsuperscript{250} In this formal sense, deep ecology is intended to be a ‘derivational system,’\textsuperscript{251} whereby deeper questioning will lead us back to ultimate premises or norms, from which we may then proceed do derive ‘particular rules or decisions applied to particular situations.’\textsuperscript{252} These particular rules or decisions derive from ultimate normative premises which, Naess claims, will \emph{inevitably} cohere with a set of ecocentric ‘platform principles.’\textsuperscript{253} More than a quasi-Rawlsian reflective equilibrium is intended here: Naess makes the very strong claim that the process of progressively deeper questioning will ‘stop’ at ultimate premises which will be consistent with an ecocentric rather than an anthropocentric stance. The platform principles are intended to ‘express the most general and basic views [supporters of deep ecology] have in common,’\textsuperscript{254} such that a manifold of ‘different traditions and cultures’\textsuperscript{255} will be compatible with these views. Thus, ‘there is a rich manifold of fundamental views compatible with the deep ecological platform.’\textsuperscript{255}

Deep ecology in its formal sense is intended to be a systematised dialogic process between theory and praxis\textsuperscript{256} in which a ‘plurality’ of ultimate norms ‘constitute[s] the multiple foundations for the theory.’\textsuperscript{257, 258} These multiple foundations are the philosophical or religious foundations within which the ultimate norms are recognised as such.\textsuperscript{259} However, it makes the very substantial claim that while deeper questioning within different traditions or paradigms or ‘worldviews’ may arrive at different ultimate norms, \emph{all} such norms are ultimately ecocentric, thus all are in keeping with the platform principles.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Naess uses the terms ‘ultimate premises,’ ‘ultimate norms,’ or simply ‘fundamentals.’ Naess, 1992 and 1993: \emph{passim}.
\item Naess, 1993: page 205.
\item The process of deeper questioning to arrive at ultimate norms and derivation from these of guidelines for decision-making is intended to be a dialogic process, and is summarised as the ‘Apron Diagram.’ This, along with the eight ‘planks’ of the Deep Ecology Platform, forms the core of much of the literature on deep ecology in its formal sense. Naess, 1988, 1992 and 1993.
\item The ‘Deep Ecology Platform’ is a set of eight general principles which are intended to be a very general statement of non-anthropocentrism. Formulated by Naess and Sessions in 1984, they are described by Naess (1993) as an expression of points which supporters of deep ecology would accept ‘at a high level of generality’. Naess, 1993: page 197.
\item Naess, 1984: page 201.
\item Naess, 1995b,c.
\item Sessions, 1995: page 58.
\item Light, 1996: page 284.
\item Naess, 1993: page 208.
\end{enumerate}
‘Whatever philosophy, whether Western or Eastern, we take as a starting point, it will not be compatible with, or at least not suitable for a defence of, present unecological policies.’\(^{260}\)

In its formal sense as a process of systematic questioning, deep ecology faces the objection that it is either trivial or circular. The circularity is clear: the stipulation that the platform principles be derivable from the ultimate premises circumscribes the latter, thus guaranteeing that they will be consistent with a stance of ecocentrism or non-anthropocentrism, since the platform principles are centred on an assertion of intrinsic value\(^{261}\) and the obligations that ensue from its recognition.\(^{262}\) Dismissing the claim that ecocentric ultimate norms are inevitable reduces the purely formal sense of deep ecology to the trivial claim that reflection upon the basis for our actions allows for clearer decisions and policy making. As a purely formal philosophical method, deep ecology appears to offer nothing more than an extolment of self-reflection upon our values as an integral part of decision-making in matters of environmental concern.

Fox raises the objection to deep ecology that the ultimate premises brought to light by the process of deep questioning need not be consistent with ecocentrism, and that one can in fact use the method to justify a highly anthropocentric viewpoint.\(^{263}\) We need not enter into a close consideration of Fox’s thesis, which is an alternative demonstration of the untenable result that obtains from stripping deep ecology down to a purely formal derivational system. If deep ecology has anything of substance to offer, then we must look to its principled content, not merely its formal methodology.\(^{264}\) Being centred on the notion of intrinsic value, however, the principles of the Deep Ecology Platform risk compounding the circularity with which

\(^{260}\) Naess, unpublished material, cited in Fox, 1995: page 94.


\(^{262}\) The last of the eight principles states: ‘Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.’ Naess, 1993: page 197.

\(^{263}\) Fox, 1995: Chapter 5.

\(^{264}\) Glasser’s response to Fox argues that deep ecology cannot be stripped down to the purely formal methodology. However, simply asserting that deep ecology is a ‘Gestalt unity’ which is ‘ontologically inspired’ merely adds to the confusion. Glasser, 1997: page 84.
the approach is fraught. Because it relies on foundational principles, and moreover seeks to ascertain ultimate norms, the deep ecology approach is clearly inconsistent with the non-foundationalist approach of the current study.

Taylor might raise an objection to the formal sense of deep ecology, and we can do so on his behalf. As Chapter Two has shown, our strong evaluations and constitutive goods (in Taylor’s terminology) cannot be explicated straightforwardly, the more fundamental goods being those nearer to ‘the inarticulate limit from which they originate.’ In other words, the goods with the strongest claim upon us are also the most difficult to articulate. We cannot simply arrive at an explication of our fundamental values through a process of reasoning. Articulating our values is never a simple matter of explication and nor is it a process with a definitive conclusion or ultimate end. As Chapter One has shown, specific claims as to what is good are underlain by general notions of the good, but the latter do not admit of reductive definition. Deep ecology in fact seems to presuppose this point: situated within ‘a plurality of philosophical or religious foundations,’ the ultimate norms are assumed to inhere in a context within which they are meaningful and thus within which their authority is recognised. The ‘multiple foundations’ of deep ecology are the potentially incompatible goods which have a strong claim upon us, and which will not admit of the reduction to explication that deep ecology proposes.

This terminological looseness reflects the dubious content of the deep ecology approach: ‘anthropocentric attitudes’ is a vague notion, and the attempt to formalise a method based on this notion reduces either to triviality or circularity. This comes as no surprise, since, as we have already seen, any reductive account of values will face this challenge. Deep ecology in its formal sense has not lived up to its promise of being the means to attain the self-understanding free of ‘anthropocentric attitudes’ which we might have understood as the ecological self. And nor does it address the substantive, and indeed empirical question of whether the inherent anthropocentric bias, which it proclaims we should overcome, is indeed a feature of current self-understanding as a result of the influence of Western traditions. The ultimate

premises it seeks to derive are proclaimed to be normative, however there is no clear statement elaborating in what sense we might understand these as normative.

4.7. Identifying with the ecological self.

Alternative accounts of deep ecology are less formal than Naess’ purely methodological sense.266 One such account postulates an ecological self which qualifies as such in virtue of its ‘wide identification:’ concern for the biosphere is an inherent part of its being the self that it is. Presupposing that our concerns and desires are a function of our self-identity, these accounts attempt to construe non-anthropocentrism or ecocentrism can be understood as stances of self-understanding.

Rather than attempting a reductive definition of the ecological self, the emphasis is placed upon the notion of wide identification, whereby the self is as comprehensive as those (ecological) entities with which it identifies. Thus,

‘The ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies. This key sentence (rather than definition) about the self, shifts the burden of clarification from the term ‘self’ to that of ‘identification,’ or rather ‘process of identification.’

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The ongoing process of wide identification is the development of the ecological self. Several accounts seek to establish just what such identification might consist in, and how it comes about. Motivating these accounts is the notion that wider identification can serve as the basis for respect or concern for the ecological entity to follow naturally or spontaneously from self-understanding.

The wide identification which defines the ecological self is propounded as the hallmark of a mature self, that is, one whose concerns have evolved beyond ordinary self-regarding desires. Thus, ‘[a] person can …be mature in social relations but have an adolescent ecological self.’268 Conceived as such, the unfolding of wider identification is a psychological process:

266 The term ‘deep ecology’ is currently so widely used as to be rendered almost meaningless; the fact that it has not been resolutely criticised as a movement might be a function of its lack of any clear definition and its appeal to principles so general as to be truisms.


‘given a deep enough understanding of the way things are, the response of being inclined to care for the unfolding of the world in all its aspects follows “naturally” – not as a logical consequence, but as a psychological consequence; as an expression of the spontaneous unfolding (development, maturing) of the self.’

Fox, having dismissed the formal sense of deep ecology as untenable, reformulates it as ‘transpersonal ecology’, whereby an ecologically mature ‘transpersonal self’ has reassessed and to some extent transcended its need to engage in ecologically exploitative practices. Based solely on the notion of wide identification, Fox’s thesis is inspired by transpersonal psychology, which describes the fully mature self as one whose concerns are a function of a self-understanding which encompasses its interconnectedness with the human and non-human world. For Shepard, the self which understands itself in terms of its ‘relatedness’ is ‘ennobled and extended.’

Postulating a mature self whose wider self-understanding is naturally and spontaneously ecocentric, Fox and Naess each intimate that this entails the need to reconsider the ethical. Perhaps because they acknowledge the circularities besetting efforts to derive an ecological ethic, they regard ethics as tangential to accounting for the ecological self. Thus, fundamental to the notion of wide identification is a shift in emphasis from legal or moral restraint, to a natural and spontaneous self-constraint of an ‘aesthetic’ kind. Appealing to Kant’s distinction between moral acts and beautiful acts, our acts can be beautiful but neither moral nor immoral. Fox asserts that ‘ethics (conceived as being concerned with moral ‘oughts’) is rendered superfluous, and approaches that issue in moral oughts are ‘repressive or ineffective’ because they ‘emphasise a limited or limiting conception of the self.’

Fox’s dichotomy between ethical restraint and a more aesthetic kind of is one we can recognise as spurious: it clearly assumes a restricted notion of morality, identified in Chapter Two as the foundationalist approach to moral philosophy in which

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269 Fox, 1995: page 247.
274 Fox, 1995: page 217.
obligations are underpinned by universalisable principled oughts. It is circular to equate a restricted notion of the self with a restricted notion of the ethical, and to assert that superseding one is to render the other superfluous.

Recognising the need to conceive the ethical more broadly, alternatives to deontological ethical theories are proposed as accommodating a meaningful notion of the ecological self. Protesting that Naess and Fox read too much into Kant’s distinction between beautiful and moral acts, Reitan dismisses their assertion that the ecological self is a non-moral notion. Rather, he suggests that ‘the ecological self is one which has acquired a certain kind of virtue.’ In other words, he suggests that we could make sense of the notion by appeal to Aristotelian virtue ethics. But he does not offer an account of how being virtuous might be integrally part of its being the self that it is; instead, he simply identifies the ecological self as an Aristotelian virtue. Reitan’s account can be seen to be based upon precisely the same circularity as the accounts of Naess and Fox: the ecological self is now conceived as ‘a precondition for being a truly moral person,’ as well as the virtue that the moral person would seek to develop. Without considering what it might mean to be ecologically virtuous, Reitan simply assumes that the ecological self is the virtuous self. We return to the question of the ecologically virtuous self later in this chapter.

Motivated by similar objections to a restrictive Kantian or deontological model of ethical theory, Matthews argues for an account of the ecological self inspired by Spinoza’s Ethics. Claiming that Spinoza’s pantheism provides a metaphysical foundation for understanding the ecological self, Matthews argues that the self which properly understands itself as a ‘self-within-wider-selves’ is naturally predisposed to behave ethically towards the ecological entity. Matthews therefore concurs with deep ecology and transpersonal ecology in asserting that respect for the ecological entity can be a natural and spontaneous outcome of a fuller understanding of the self. However, her account differs to the extent that it appeals to metaphysical assertions to establish that the self should be viewed in this way.

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276 Reitan, 1996.
277 Reitan, 1996: page 424.
279 Spinoza’s pantheism is understood as the doctrine that there is only one substance and it is divine. Honderich, 1995: page 641.
Matthews’ account of the ecological self is centred on the notion that it is a ‘truer’ self-understanding which is occluded as a result of the way the self is represented to us by our culture. In particular, she contends that the representation of the self by Western culture, being essentially Cartesian in its conception, is too narrow and limiting. By contrast, the ecological self is ‘a viable human being,’ that is one which is ‘informed with a viable culture, which is in turn an eco-sensitive culture’ which represents to us the truth of our interconnectedness with nature. Matthews’ account must be understood as the assertion that our understanding of the self should become something other than that which it currently is: her claim is that we ought to embrace a less exploitative stance towards the ecological entity, this through a wider self-understanding, which in turn would ensue from the self being represented as such by its culture. Presumably, however, the culture representing the self as the ecological self would depend upon individual selves coming to understand themselves as such. This suggests that in her notion of the ecological self, Matthews not only begs the question of why we should embrace a less exploitative stance towards nature, but that circularity might also be lurking in the way she conceives of our coming to be such selves.

Taylor might raise an objection to these various notions of wider identification, and once again we can do so on his behalf. As we have seen, the goods which have the strongest claim upon us are those with which we most closely identify, and these are in general the most difficult to articulate. Such goods can be understood as constitutive goods, in that they are irreducibly part of self-identity. In order to avoid positing metaphysical foundations for identification or a ‘wider self,’ we should understand the self in terms of its constitutive goods, and indeed in a way in which the philosophical appropriately recapitulates the pre-philosophical. Thus, our experience simply is that we identify with our most fundamental goods, not with the entities in which they are instantiated. The various accounts which seek to understand the ecological self as a subject that identifies with an (ecological) object would seem not to notice the limitations of their own metaphysical bias.

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4.8. Valuing the ecological self.

A critique of metaphysical dualisms is central to Plumwood’s account of the ecological self. For Plumwood, a dualism, being ‘more than a relation of dichotomy, difference, or non-identity, and more than a simple hierarchical relationship,’ is ‘a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture.’\(^{283}\) In other words, Plumwood is asserting that dualisms are inherently value dualisms, whereby the terms are evaluative. Her central point is that the human/nature relationship has become a dualism of separation and domination. This she contrasts with ‘ecological selfhood,’ which is by definition the self to whom the thriving of nature is related ‘not instrumentally but essentially.’\(^{284}\) Plumwood claims that ecological selfhood has become obscured by the dualisms of rationality: human/nature, culture/nature, reason/emotion, mind/body, and rationality/animality are examples of dualisms that form an interrelated set which collectively reaffirms the separation of the self from nature. This she views as an ‘ecological crisis of reason.’\(^{285}\) All terms on the dominant side are forms of reason, while all terms on the devalued side are forms of nature.\(^{286}\) As such, the ecological self is described as one that must be understood in terms of negating the dualisms of rationality by which it is obscured.

Plumwood claims that deep ecology is complicit in the dualisms that reaffirm the domination of nature to the extent that it emphasises its own version of the rationalist self which privileges reason over emotion.\(^{287}\) Further, she claims that deep ecology must answer the challenge that its notion of wider identification is in fact a conflation of three different senses of the wider self: wider identification can be understood in terms of the ultimate indistinguishability of the self and the ecological entity, the expansion of the self to encompass concern for the ecological entity, and the transcendence of the self in which the interests of the self and the ecological entity are merged.\(^{288}\) She claims, furthermore that all three senses of identification are unnecessary, rendered superfluous by a relational account of the self which is the

\(^{283}\) Plumwood, 1993: page 47.
\(^{284}\) Plumwood, 1993: page 160.
\(^{285}\) Plumwood, 2002: Chapter 1.
\(^{286}\) Plumwood, 1993: page 44.
\(^{287}\) Plumwood, 1991: pp. 11-16.
\(^{288}\) Plumwood, 1993: pp. 176-182.
ecological self. Such a self is one for whom respect for nature is an essential part of
‘an identity expressed in caring practices which treat the other non-instrumentally.’
To treat the ecological entity ‘non-instrumentally’ is to see it as ‘intrinsically worthy
or valuable,’ such that ‘the relational self and intrinsic value are …essential
theoretical complements of [an] …account of ecological selfhood.’ Thus, while
rejecting the dualisms of reason, Plumwood’s account presupposes a distinction
between instrumental and intrinsic value, which was examined in Chapter One of this
study and shown to be a false distinction.

By asserting that the ecological self is occluded by the dualisms of rationality while at
the same time being the means to overcome them, Plumwood’s account must defend
the charge that it falls victim to the same circularity which challenges all accounts of
the ecological self examined thus far. By relying upon a fundamental distinction
between instrumental and intrinsic value, her account assumes the very thing which it
elsewhere denounces. Thus, Plumwood claims that efforts to afford normative status
to the ecological entity are in fact part of the problem, to the extent that they reaffirm
the separateness of the ecological entity by assuming a passive entity which we
can evaluate. An impoverished notion of the ethical can immediately be seen to inform
this assertion: by pitching the problem in terms of the ecological entity and our
relationship to it, then asserting that we should simply value the entity differently to
the way we do in fact, Plumwood’s account simply reiterates the circular arguments
of intrinsic value examined in Chapter One. An unsubstantiated notion of dualistic
rationality is pitched against a question-begging notion of the ecological self as an
essentially relational self from whom concern for the ecological entity flows
spontaneously. The Pelagian claim of Plumwood’s account is that the relational
ecological self should simply be afforded priority, thus reversing the dualisms of
rationality in terms of which the domination of nature is sanctioned.

Part of Plumwood’s critique of rationalism is an emphasis of the role of emotions and
the body over that of reason and the mind. This is in part intended as a critique of
value-based ethics which she claims reaffirms the separateness of the ecological entity

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290 Plumwood, 1993: page 185.
in the sense that the entity ascribed value is objectified as the valued ‘other.’ However, simply to reverse the ‘dualism’ of reason and emotion in favour of the latter is surely to endorse a dualism of the very kind she condemns: as we have seen, moral reactions cannot be understood solely in terms of reason, but neither can they be solely understood in terms of emotion. The moral reaction is, by definition, prior to any separation of the affective and the conceptual, and it can make no sense to claim that it is either purely rational or purely emotional or otherwise purely affective. Both of these alternatives obfuscate, depriving the moral reaction of its evaluative content. A dichotomy between reason and emotion cannot cohere with any approach to morality that begins with our experience, of which the moral reaction forms an integral part. Moreover, it is to attack a straw-man conception of rationality to construe the self as only or purely rational. Being an over-generalised critique of the Western tradition and the dualisms of rationality it purportedly engenders, Plumwood’s account does not succeed in establishing that there could or should be an ecological self.


One might postulate that our natural tendencies towards concern for the ecological entity are occluded by the influence of modern culture. And indeed this line of argument is adopted by several contemporary accounts: they hold to the view that understanding this influence should be an integral part of a reappraisal of our relationship with the ecological entity, whereby the ecological self can be discerned as the condition of being free from these distortions or hindrances. This notion is open to interpretation in terms of romanticised notions of a pre-modern self living in harmony with nature. But the idea of a prior or ‘untainted’ self that has been obscured or forgotten is merely Arcadian fiction. Avoiding this, the contemporary accounts postulate that the ecological self might be a latent potentiality, common to us all, for a more benign relationship with the ecological entity. The ecological self is thus construed as a potentiality which would be realised only once the influence of modern culture has been understood and overcome.

For ecofeminists, the question of whether there can be an ecological self is essentially a question of gender. Postulating a link between exploitative attitudes to nature and
gender-based oppression, ecofeminism can be defined as ‘the position that there are important connections – historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical – between the domination of women and the domination of nature.’ This very general description encompasses a range of interpretations of the role of gender in our relationship with the ecological entity. However, each of these can be seen to be making a more specific claim than the approaches, such as deep ecology, which focus on the inherently vague notion of anthropocentrism. Indeed, it is a particular type of anthropocentrism that is seen to be the issue. Thus, an alternative statement of the thesis of ecofeminism is that androcentrism rather than anthropocentrism is at the root of the domination of nature. Shiva, for example, asserts that androcentrism is ‘the oldest of oppressions.’

Ecofeminism encompasses a variety of claims about the role of gender in our relationship with the ecological entity. While for some this relationship is essentially one of domination which must be understood as essentially gendered, for others, gender provides an ‘epistemic privilege’ which allows for our more fully understanding our relationship with the ecological entity. This epistemic privilege is itself understood in different ways. One strand of ecofeminism asserts that the feminine perspective is privileged to the extent that ‘women recognize and empathize with the exploitation of nature because that exploitation so resembles [their] own.’ An alternative strand asserts that the feminine perspective is privileged because such empathy is inherently part of the female gender identity. Without necessarily taking a stance on what this epistemic privilege actually is, other ecofeminist writers make substantial claims as to what it entails. Thus, for some the epistemic privilege enables the understanding necessary for the articulation of a ‘new’ environmental ethic. These latter do not, however, elaborate just how this may be the case, nor what this ethic might be.

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297 Slicer, page 33.
Ecofeminism can be seen to be making several claims about our relationship with the ecological entity, and it is necessary to distinguish these in order to clearly understand and critically assess them. Thus, we can see that by construing our relationship with nature as domineering and essentially gendered, ecofeminism is making a claim about what this relationship is in fact. This is an empirical claim, and one which it must substantiate on two counts: it must establish that our relationship is in fact domineering, and if this is so, that this is due to our relationship with the entity being essentially gendered. Plumwood postulates reasons as to why this relationship is gendered, elaborating upon her thesis about the dualisms of reason. These, she claims, are gendered dualisms: ‘a gendered reason/nature contrast appears as the overarching, most general form of these dualisms,’ identified with the result that whatever is associated with emotion, body, nature, and women is regarded as inferior to that which is associated with reason, mind, culture, and men. Being a claim about that which underlies or informs the gendered bias in our relationship with the ecological entity, Plumwood’s is also an empirical claim, and therefore one which must be substantiated.

In contrast to these empirical claims, it is a different claim that the feminine perspective is the basis for establishing a more egalitarian relationship with nature. Implicit in this claim is the assumption that the feminine perspective is something we could or should attain. Just such a view is propounded by Hallen: concurring with Plumwood that the ecological self should be understood as the relational self, Hallen argues that the ‘relational view might be easier for women to attain because of their gender identity.’

Hallen’s claim illustrates a distinction in the ecofeminist position which proves to be pivotal. Claiming that it is the relational view which we should attain, Hallen implies that it is this which is, or corresponds to the epistemic privilege. The feminine perspective is the best means to attain it, and even then perhaps not the only means to attain this privilege. The implication would seem to be that it is not the feminine perspective per se which constitutes or affords the epistemic privilege. And in turn this would seem to suggest that there is nothing essentially or inherently gendered

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299 Hallen, 1995: page 204.
about the epistemic privilege. If we take Hallen’s claim to its logical end, then the ecofeminist claim that our relationship with the ecological entity is essentially a gendered one is undermined. It would seem that the only alternative to Hallen’s position is the assertion that this relationship is in fact gendered, but this as we have seen is an empirical claim, and therefore one that must be substantiated as such.

The epistemic privilege of the feminine-relational-ecological self has not been established: it is not clear that there can be any such epistemic privilege, nor how we might attain to it, nor indeed that it is necessarily gendered. Yet substantial claims are made as to what this privilege entails. One such is the claim that the epistemic privilege is sufficient to enable the derivation of an ecological ethic. We can readily see that this is a very substantial claim: it must be the claim that the circularity which has hitherto defeated the effort to derive such an ethic is somehow overcome by construing the question as a feminist one. Their implicit claim to have overcome this circularity would seem, however, to be based upon a circularity of their own, namely that the relational self is the self that naturally relates to the ecological entity as intrinsically valuable. This, as we have already seen, is the charge which Plumwood’s account must defend.

Unless it can substantiate the empirical claim that our relationship with the ecological entity is in fact essentially gendered, then ecofeminism cannot stand as a distinct position. This would mean that it would simply collapse into a more general thesis of the way in which the ecological self is occluded by the influence of modern culture. One such is social ecology. Social ecologists claim that the natural world is ‘oppressed by the same exploitative, hierarchical values and institutions that once denied rights to slaves and continue to oppress many women, racial minorities, and labourers of all colours.’

Postulating that two facets of the self, one animal and organic, the other social and cultural, are in tension, social ecologists claim that the self is ‘riddled by contradictions, antagonisms, and conflicting interests.’

Asserting the need to realise or indeed liberate an idealised self in which the two

300 Nash, 1990: page 212.
301 Bookchin, 1993: page 361.
302 Gaard, an ecofeminist, makes an almost identical claim. She asserts the need to ‘redefine “human” identity as “human-animal,” a concept which articulates an ecofeminist ecological self.’ Gaard, 1997: page 24.
facets are brought into harmony, their claim is simply that this ideal self would flourish in the ideal conditions which would ensue from the disablement of social and political oppression.\footnote{Social ecology asserts the need for social revolution in which power is decentralised and the emphasis is instead on ‘bioregionalism.’ This can be viewed as a call for ‘eco-anarchy.’}

We can readily see that the thesis of social ecology does not offer us much that is new. We have already seen that the self is ‘riddled’ by contradictions, antagonisms, and conflicting interests. And we cannot derive much from the claim that an ideal self would flourish in ideal conditions. Again, the claims of social ecology would seem to be largely empirical: while it does offer a thesis as to how the ecological self might be attained, it is clear that it could only be through social or political revolution that this might be achieved. As such, it contributes nothing to understanding the ecological self as a latent potentiality, already immanently part of the selves that we are.

4.10. Internalising the ecological self.

If the ecological self is to be a meaningful concept, then some substantial notion of selfhood must be implicit therein. That is, we must be able to understand \textit{ourselves} as essentially related to the ecological self, and in such a way that we can understand \textit{how} the ideal of the ecological self might be integrated or realised as a latent potentiality. Only thus might attaining to the ecological self be understood as a meaningful task, indeed integrally part of the task of being a self. And if we accept Taylor’s thesis that the self is constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values, such that there is a constitutive relation between the self and the good, then the ecological self which we would ideally integrate must in some be nearer to the good. That is, there must be a constitutive relation between the ecological self and the good, but in such a way that our attaining to the ecological self is our coming nearer to that good. A conception of the ecological self, therefore, would be meaningful only in terms our relationship with the good.

The contemporary accounts of the ecological self which we have considered thus far have not convincingly addressed the question of how the self relates to the good. Indeed, some of these accounts can be seen to be inconsistent to the extent that they
assume a conception of selfhood which does not correspond to the conception of the
good they seem to assume, the latter being some notion of an ecological good such as
the intrinsic value of the ecological entity. Such a good is fore-ordained to be that
which all ecological selves will come to see and respect. But unless the self is
conceived in such a way that it is constitutionally related to this good, then we would
seem to be left with a Pelagian or voluntarist or perhaps Sartrean self which not only
could, but indeed would freely and rationally choose to recognise this good. Thus, on
the one hand, the self is construed as being free to rationally adopt conceptions of the
good, while on the other hand the good is construed as a quasi-Platonic good fore-
ordained as that which the self is bound to see. To be free to choose the good that all
selves will inevitably come to see is hardly the freedom of the self that chooses its
ends.

Anscombe has suggested a means to understand the self as meaningfully relating itself
with the good. As Chapter One has shown, the aretaic notions of virtue and
excellence are the means of so doing.\textsuperscript{304} As we have seen, MacIntyre’s account of the
self can be understood as following her lead, while Taylor’s account can be
understood as building upon MacIntyre’s. While not necessarily taking any lead from
either Taylor or MacIntyre, several contemporary accounts put forward the possibility
that the ecological self might be understood as an aretaic notion, and these accounts
can therefore be understood as following Anscombe’s lead. Whether or not they
succeed in establishing a viable account of the ecological self is the question to which
we now turn.

4.11. Postulating the ecologically virtuous self.

Several contemporary accounts have sought to establish the basis for an
environmental virtue ethics. These we might understand as seeking to establish the
ecological self as the ecologically virtuous self: being one which is defined in terms of
aretaic notions, such a conception of the ecological self would be something we might
understand as an immanent potentiality, thus one we might integrate and cultivate as a
facet of ourselves, or otherwise aspire to attain.

\textsuperscript{304} Anscombe, 1958: page 9.
Generally acknowledged as offering the earliest account of an environmental virtue ethics, Hill proposes that the environmentally conscious individual displays traits that can be regarded as excellences.\(^{305}\) In contrast to the individual who is indifferent to nature, such traits as humility, self-acceptance, gratitude and sensitivity to others are postulated as the environmental virtues.\(^{306}\) Hill proposes that it is through the cultivation of such traits that one might ‘have reason to promote the love of nature.’\(^{307}\) Hill does not, however, elaborate just how this love of nature would manifest or what form it might take. His account is best regarded as a first sketch, upon which later accounts have sought to elaborate.

Franz offers an account that seeks to augment Hill’s account, proposing that humility should be associated with ‘openness’, which he identifies as another environmental virtue.\(^{308}\) Thus, ‘openness’ is intended to be the basis upon which we might ‘reorient all actions henceforth in terms of a holistic, ecologically based way of thinking,’\(^{308}\) such that we might ‘think and act within a new environmental paradigm.’\(^{309}\) In direct parallel is an account proposed by Reitan,\(^{276}\) for whom ‘the environmentally virtuous person would be one who spontaneously and lovingly pursued the preservation of the environment as if that environment were an extension of herself.’\(^{310}\) Thus, both accounts invoke the now familiar notions of interconnectedness, extensions of oneself, and ‘holistic thinking.’\(^{311}\)

Neither Hill nor Franz nor Reitan addresses the question of how the environmentally virtuous self might be realised. While there is clearly nothing incoherent about extolling the agent who promotes a love of nature and Hill and Reitan do, doing so contributes nothing to our understanding a love of nature as something that could or should be immanently part of our being the selves that we are. Indeed, doing so is comparable to extolling the agent who promotes a love of fine art or great literature: while these may well be virtuous actions, they can be understood without necessarily

\(^{305}\) Hill, 1983.
\(^{306}\) Hill, 1983: pp. 219-222.
\(^{307}\) Hill, 1983: page 224.
\(^{308}\) Franz, 1993.
\(^{309}\) Franz, 1993: page 261.
\(^{310}\) Reitan, 1996: page 424.
\(^{311}\) Accounts that invoke ‘holistic thinking’ never elaborate what it could possibly mean.
being integrally part of the selves that we are. To claim, as Reitan does, that the environmentally virtuous self promotes a love of nature as if it were ‘an extension of herself’ does not suffice as an explanation of how this is in fact integrally part of being the virtuous self. Indeed, it is clear that Reitan’s claim, along with Franz’s notion of openness, simply reiterates the untenable notion of wide identification as proposed by deep ecology. Far from elaborating upon what it could mean to be environmentally virtuous, notions of openness and expansiveness of the self merely defer the explanation to vague notions of interconnectedness.

Some more recent accounts of the environmentally virtuous self appeal to the notion of an ecological good. Sandler proposes that ‘any genuinely virtuous agent will be disposed to promote ecosystem sustainability,’ since ‘ecosystem sustainability is a necessary external good for cultivating virtues and/or human flourishing.’ Moreover, Sandler claims that some other ‘standard of environmental health’ will substitute for ecosystem sustainability, such as ‘ecological integrity.’ Similarly, Rolston claims that environmental virtue is intelligible only with respect to an ecological entity which is intrinsically valuable: since ‘it is hard to gain much excellence of character from appreciating an otherwise worthless thing,’ the virtuous self is meaningful only by appealing to the intrinsic value of the ecological entity. Thus, Sandler and Rolston each defers to the ecological entity in order to explain the disposition of the ecologically virtuous self. By so doing, they can be understood to be invoking the good of the ecological entity as the basis for virtuous action.

Sandler’s account faces the objection that ‘ecosystem sustainability’ or ‘ecological integrity’ is a vague notion of the ecological good. It is not clear that any such notion should necessarily be connected with the virtuous self. Indeed, such a notion is entirely consistent with seeking to preserve the instrumental value of the ecological entity, thus being something which the self whose action is informed only by prudent self-interest might also seek to preserve. Sandler would seem to assume some other notion of an ecological good is behind the notion of ecosystem sustainability or

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312 Sandler, 2003: page 279.
313 Sandler, 2003: page 280.
314 Rolston, 2005: page 68.
integrity, or indeed intrinsic to the ecological entity. But this cannot be assumed, and must be established. To the extent that it is beholden to the notion of intrinsic value, Sandler’s account concerns the ecological entity, and less so the virtuous self or the ecological self.

We should immediately be suspicious of any account of the environmentally virtuous self which is dependent upon the idea of intrinsic value. To conceive of virtue ethics in this way is to construe it as a foundationalist enterprise in which the point of the ethic is to provide justificatory principles. Thus, Sandler’s notion of ‘external’ goods, defined as ‘goods beyond the agent’s control’, is intended ‘establish the normativity of a disposition to promote ecosystem sustainability’.

‘An environmental virtue ethic …provides an objective platform from which prevailing cultural attitudes, policies, practices, and lifestyles can be judged and, when appropriate, indicted. If a cultural practice or policy fails to exhibit ecological sensitivity, then it is subject to criticism for that reason.’

Cafaro makes a similar claim:

’an environmental virtue ethics can provide strong grounds for environmental protection,’ Cafaro appeals to non-anthropocentrism and intrinsic value as underpinning our reasons for preserving the natural environment. For Cafaro, environmental virtue ethics is integrally part of an overall foundationalist enterprise, such that it ‘is not an alternative to environmental ethics which focus on the moral considerability of wild nature, but rather completes them.’

Sandler and Cafaro each take an approach to virtue ethics which focuses on the action rather than the agent. Both see the point of an environmental virtue ethics as providing a principled basis from which these actions could be judged as right or wrong, thereby regarding it as merely an alternative route to the articulation of justificatory principles. But this is not consistent with the motivation behind virtue ethics as Anscombe understands it, to regard aretaic notions of virtue and excellence as more fundamental than deontic notions such as moral obligation. Rather, their

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315 Sandler, 2003: page 286.
316 Sandler, 2003: page 284.
allegiance would seem to be with the very thing which Anscombe discredits, namely the foundationalist moral philosophy of universalisable principles. If we accept Anscombe’s thesis, then we must conclude that virtue ethics is misconstrued as a foundationalist enterprise.

Part of Anscombe’s assertion of the need to reanimate the ethical is the need to reanimate the notion of selfhood in such a way that it can be understood in terms of some essential relation with the good. The latter, for Anscombe, is excellence or virtue. But we need not be beholden to Anscombe’s formulation, and indeed we may come to find it a limiting conception of the way in which selfhood is essentially related to the good. Indeed, Taylor’s notion of the constitutive relation between self and good invites a wider interpretation than Anscombe’s. But nevertheless her key point stands, namely that selfhood must be understood in some essential relation with the good. That is, its being so related is essential to the self’s being the self that it is.

And it is clear that an environmental virtue ethics in which some foreordained external good such as intrinsic value is explicitly or implicitly built into the account misses this point, and thereby misconstrues the nature of virtue ethics. Moreover, to build an external good such as this into the account must invite the charge of circularity: the environmental virtues are taken to be those that promote some end such as ecosystem sustainability or integrity, thereby guaranteeing that the virtuous self will act in accordance with this desirable outcome.

4.12. The schizophrenia of the ecologically virtuous self.

The wellbeing of the ecosystem, or any other conception of an external environmental good which we might somehow objectify, is not something we could understand as being integrally part of an account of the virtues or of the virtuous self. While there is clearly nothing incoherent about our citing it as a reason why some action is preferable to another, this does not entail that it can be, or should be an essential component of a virtue ethics account. In other words, there is no clear connection between this notion and the virtuous self: there is no reason why the agent who acts in accordance with sustainability (assuming that it is meaningful to do so) must be identified as the virtuous self, and there is no clear reason why it is necessarily or only
the virtuous self that would act in this way. We might cite any number of reasons as
to why some action is preferable or not, but this says nothing about how we should
understand the self that has so acted. The key point is that we must be able to
understand the self in terms of the virtue that has motivated its action. Only thus
might we understand it as the virtuous self.

By building some external notion of the good into the account of the virtuous self,
contemporary accounts of virtue ethics reveal their allegiance to a foundationalist
conception of the ethical. We have defined a foundationalist account as one which is
concerned to establish justificatory principles. And therein lies the problem: the
contemporary accounts seek to establish justification for the self being the virtuous
self and its action being virtuous action, or else assume that there should be such a
justification. But they also seek to understand the self per se on the same terms.

Stocker takes up and develops the point. Taking issue with ethical theories in general
rather than just virtue ethics, he asserts that there exists an inherent and unavoidable
disparity between reason and motive which he dubs ‘the schizophrenia of modern
ethical theories.’

‘if we take as motives, embody in our motives, those various things which
recent ethical theories hold to be ultimately good or right, we will, of necessity,
be unable to have those motives.’

Stocker’s point is that if we take the justificatory principles of modern ethical theories
to be our motives, ‘the result would be destructive to the moral life and to the
relationships between human beings.’ Stocker cites the example of friendship: to
act from a sense of duty to a friend, seeing it as our duty to act in friendship, is to fail
to be motivated by friendship, with the result that there could be no friendship.

Contemporary accounts of virtue ethics which explicitly or implicitly build in some
notion of the good of the ecological entity face the objection that they are
‘schizophrenic’ as Stocker describes, and ultimately circular. By anchoring
themselves to some desirable outcome such as the wellbeing of the ecological entity,

320 Stocker, 1976.
they seek to account for both justification and motivation, thus reason and motive, of the ecologically virtuous agents. The circularity is that the ecologically virtuous agent is defined in such a way that the desired outcome is guaranteed. While we might applaud or deplore the actions of the agent according to their impact on the ecological entity, we cannot understand the self on this basis. The wellbeing of the ecological entity may be a desirable outcome, but it no more motivates the environmentally virtuous than global warming or species extinction motivate the environmentally vicious. If we are to understand the environmentally virtuous, then we must understand them as being motivated to be virtuous simpliciter. That is, internal to an understanding of the virtues is the motivation to pursue them, and no external motivation is necessary. Moreover, it cannot be accommodated.

We must conclude that it is incoherent to conceive of the environmentally virtuous self in such a way that it assumes or depends upon a desirable outcome such as the wellbeing of the ecological entity. But it is not incoherent, as we have seen, to cite this as a reason for acting in a manner that it environmentally laudable. The essential point is that the self could be so motivated only by prudent self-interest. And this is not a basis for understanding it as virtuous: prudent self-interest is not an aretaic notion.

Swanton proposes an understanding of the virtuous self that circumvents Stocker’s schizophrenia problem. She argues that motivation derives from the virtues, and not from duty, if actions express the virtues of the person: to act out of friendship, in contrast to acting for the sake of friendship, is to express oneself as a friend and to enable oneself to be understood as such. Swanton’s account is consistent with Anscombe’s thesis that aretaic notions of virtue and excellence should be understood as fundamental. For the environmentally virtuous self, however, the obvious question arises as to which virtue might define the environmentally virtuous self as such. Several contemporary accounts have sought to address this question.

4.13. Sensitivity as the cardinal virtue of the ecological self.

Various accounts propose to identify the key environmental virtue that will characterise the environmentally virtuous self. Sandler proposes sensitivity as a ‘uniquely environmental virtue’\textsuperscript{324} that is ‘a discrete virtue applicable to all and only environmental interactions and relationships.’\textsuperscript{325} By asserting that it applies to all and only environmental issues, Sandler implies that sensitivity is both necessary and sufficient for environmental virtue, however he does not elaborate how this might be so. Along similar lines, Shaw identifies three ‘land virtues:’ these are respect (ecological sensitivity), prudence, and practical judgement.\textsuperscript{326} Also thinking along similar lines is Franz, who identifies benevolence as a genus of virtues which encompasses concern for ‘the best interest of nonhuman others.’\textsuperscript{327} For Franz, the exercise of this virtue is prerequisite to an understanding of the needs of those nonhuman others, and to this end he advocates personal and scientific study of the nonhuman world in order to cultivate ‘an openness that heightens our sensitivity to the concerns, behaviours, subtle features, and goal-directed activities of non-human entities.’\textsuperscript{327} Thus, we can observe a general convergence among these various accounts upon some notion of sensitivity to the needs of the nonhuman world as the uniquely environmental virtue.

The bare assertion that sensitivity characterises the environmentally virtuous self cannot stand without justification: it must be established just how this might be so. If the notion is to succeed, then we must be able to understand it as more than merely some trait which the self possesses; we must be able to understand it as an excellence or virtue which defines the self and in which some substantial conception of selfhood is implicit. That is, we need to understand how sensitivity might function as an aretaic notion. It is not clear, however, how this could be so. Sandler’s sensitivity, Hill’s humility, and Franz’s openness could at one level be identified as equivalent to deep ecology’s wide identification. But we have already seen that the latter is an untenable notion. If sensitivity is to be an environmental virtue then we need to understand the virtuous agent as one who acts out of sensitivity, and in such a way as to express the sensitive self that it is.

\textsuperscript{324} Sandler, 2004: page 478.  
\textsuperscript{325} Sandler, 2004: page 481.  
\textsuperscript{326} Shaw, 2005: page 100.  
\textsuperscript{327} Franz, 2005: page 127.
An elaboration of sensitivity as an environmental virtue is offered by van Wensveen, who equates it with the cardinal virtue of practical wisdom. Thus, ‘The exercise of practical wisdom thus takes on an intensified form, which environmentalists tend to refer to as sensitivity. This …can therefore be considered a synonym for practical wisdom.’

According to van Wensveen, sensitivity can be considered a cardinal virtue to the extent that it is prerequisite for virtuous agency in general. So conceived, sensitivity is a more substantial notion than wide identification or ‘openness’, properly being an aretaic notion to the extent that it implies some notion of selfhood that can be understood in terms of its excellence.

It is far from clear, however, that sensitivity construed in this way is necessarily an environmental virtue, nor indeed how it is sufficient to characterise the environmentally virtuous self. It would be circular to claim that the environmentally virtuous are those who are sensitive to ecological wellbeing. We cannot simply identify sensitivity with practical wisdom and thereby assume that it functions as an aretaic notion. It would therefore seem that van Wensveen’s equation of sensitivity and practical wisdom is too quick: practical wisdom must mean much more than sensitivity. At the very least, sensitivity suggests a passive capacity, while practical wisdom suggests an active capacity that the agent might exercise and cultivate. It is surely the latter sense that is intended in the Classical Greek notion of practical wisdom: phronesis, generally understood as practical wisdom but also as prudence, must be understood as a deliberative excellence, thus as an active capacity that one might exercise and cultivate. A potential to thereby attain (or at the very least aspire to attain) some degree of excellence is surely internal to the notion. It is this internal relationship with excellence that is the key to understanding the notion as aretaic. A thorough consideration of phronesis is beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, we can see that practical wisdom naturally lends itself to being understood as an aretaic notion, while it can only be contentious to assume that sensitivity should be understood in the same way.

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329 Classically the four cardinal virtues are temperance, justice, courage, and practical wisdom, later augmented by the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity.
To understand a notion as aretaic is necessarily to understand it as a substantial notion in which an understanding of the exercise and cultivation of the excellence is implicit. This must be the case with practical wisdom: the notion connotes a soundness of judgement which in turn connotes some understanding of the consummation of the excellences in a life well lived. This is indeed the usual reading of Aristotle, for whom *phronesis* bears a close relationship with choice (*prohairesis*) as well as an understanding living well (*eudaimonia*). Whether or not *eudaimonia* is essential to an understanding of virtue ethics, and whether or nor virtue ethics need necessarily be understood as teleological, and whether or not Aristotle defined the virtues in terms of *eudaimonia*, are contentious issues that are not the concern of this study. It is sufficient to note that an aretaic notion defines selfhood in terms of its excellence, being a notion in which the good of the whole life is implicit. This is the point of Aristotle’s claim that ‘the starting point for ethical enquiry [is] that the relationship of ‘man’ to ‘living well’ is analogous to that of ‘harpist’ to ‘playing the harp well’.’ Whether or not we understand this teleologically, the point is that aretaic notions are inseparable from an understanding of human fulfilment.

If the environmentally virtuous self is to be coherent as a conception of the ecological self, then it is clear that it cannot be based solely on the notion of sensitivity as the specifically environmental virtue. We cannot simply reduce the account of the environmentally virtuous self to an account of sensitivity, and expect that the latter will be sufficient to explain the former. But this is not to suggest that the notion of sensitivity can have nothing to contribute towards an understanding of virtue. On the contrary, we can readily see that it should have a pivotal role to play in the exercise of the virtues: sensitivity to the potentially inconsistent claims deriving from the other virtues is part of being virtuous. Sensitivity might therefore be regarded as among the prerequisites to the exercise of the virtues. Should the environmentally virtuous self be a workable conception of the ecological self, then understanding the role of

332 Trianosky proposes that we distinguish two basis types of virtue ethics, viz. teleological and non-teleological. Trianosky, 1990.
333 Simpson asserts that the virtues fall into the definition of *eudaimonia*, but *eudaimonia* does not fall into the definition of the virtues. Simpson, 1992: pp. 507-8.
334 MacIntyre, 2002: page 58.
sensitivity may be the means to understand how this is so. However, a fuller account of the virtues is required.


McDowell offers an account of virtue which draws together the notions of sensitivity and selfhood. For McDowell, sensitivity is

‘what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one’s behaviour. It is a single complex sensitivity …which we are aiming to instil when we aim to inculcate a moral outlook.’

The suggestion is that rather than seeking to identify one particular or exclusively environmental virtue, a more productive approach might be to follow McDowell and approach the question of virtue via the capacities of the self that enable it to be exercised.

McDowell’s notion of a ‘single complex sensitivity’ indicates that his is a thesis which presupposes the unity of the virtues. For McDowell, the virtues should not be treated as individually reducible to ‘specialized sensitivities,’ and his notion of the unity of the virtues is the requirement that ‘no one virtue can be fully possessed except by a possessor of all of them.’

Thus, in any one situation there are no overriding virtues foreordained as such. Rather than seeing the situation solely or exclusively in terms of one particular virtue, the virtuous agent is sensitive to what the situation demands, and therefore also to the simultaneous, and possibly competing demands of the different virtues. McDowell’s thesis seems to suggest that if we are to account for the environmentally virtuous self, then we can appeal only to the overall condition of being virtuous, and thus sensitive, not to any particular virtue.

McDowell’s conception of virtue as sensitivity circumvents the conflicts of values and virtues that will inevitably beset any account that seeks to isolate individual values or virtues. An action that is virtuous in one context might be vicious in another: our instrumental stance towards the ecological entity, inevitably assumed in our consumption of natural resources, is misconstrued as evincing a lack of some

335 McDowell, 1979: page 333.
putative environmental virtue such as humility or openness or sensitivity. It is a trivial point that our exploitation of the ecological entity can in many cases be understood as virtuous. We need not invoke the endmost example of the third-world labourer who fells a rainforest tree in order to feed his family, thereby exercising all the virtues that caring for his family entails. We might practice our skill at wood-working, displaying traits that some would regard as excellences as we create exquisite violins from the wood of a tree we have felled.

For McDowell, a virtue can be understood as issuing in nothing but right conduct. However, he understands right conduct as being grasable only ‘from the inside out’: right conduct can be grasped only as expressing virtue, and is not reducible to universal terms. Socrates’ question cannot be given a direct answer in universal terms. Rather, the virtuous self brings all of the virtues to the situation. At first glance, however, this would seem to reduce to the trivial claim that we need to weigh up the situation we find ourselves in, and assess it on its merits. If this is all McDowell is saying, then he is saying very little.

This trivial reading of McDowell’s account is avoided once the question of motivation is considered. Part of McDowell’s thesis that the virtues are not derivative, such that right conduct is grasable only ‘from the inside out’, is that sensitivity must fully account for the virtuous agent’s motivation. Thus, the agent’s sensitivity to the requirements imposed by a situation ‘must exhaust his reason for acting as he does. It would disqualify an action from counting as a manifestation of [virtue] if its agent needed some extraneous incentive to compliance [sic] with the requirement.’ By building in an account of motivation, McDowell can distinguish the virtuous agent from the agent who is merely continent: the latter may understand what is required by the situation in which it finds itself without being motivated to act in accordance with the requirements it perceives. We must be able to explain the difference between the virtuous agent and the merely continent agent in terms of some excellence on the part of the former which is lacking in the latter. If sensitivity is to fully account for the virtuous agent’s motivation, then it will account for the difference between the virtuous and the merely continent.

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4.15. The motivational self-concept: tracing virtue to its source.

McDowell offers an account in which sensitivity to the requirements imposed by a situation enables as well as motivates the virtuous self to exercise its virtue and thus express the virtuous self that it is. Sensitivity so construed must distinguish the virtuous agent from the agent who is merely continent. Being prerequisite to the exercise of virtue, sensitivity must enable the virtuous self to express its virtue in a way that the merely continent self does not or cannot. It is necessary to account for the virtuous self as one with more than an immediate awareness of the salient features of the situation in which it finds itself: sensitivity to the requirements imposed by a situation must include an understanding of the self as one that can respond skilfully or otherwise, virtuously or not. Prerequisite to the exercise of virtue must be some understanding of an answer to Socrates’ question, thus some understanding of a good way to live, or at the very least some understanding that its attainment is both desirable and possible.

Central to McDowell’s account is the idea that morality cannot be fully codified: the virtuous person’s judgement cannot be a matter of balancing reasons for and against undertaking a certain action. While this might seem to construe the virtuous agent in terms of blindness rather than sensitivity, McDowell avoids this by invoking the Aristotelian notion of the practical syllogism: virtuous action is explained in terms of a major premise, which is a conception of how to live, and a minor premise, which latter is an immediate awareness of the salient features of the present situation. It is on the basis of the major premise that the salient features of the present situation are decided: in a situation in which different virtues might make inconsistent demands, the virtuous self sees the situation in terms of the virtues by which it understands itself. While this can be read as the Aristotelian notion of ‘non-rational habituation of the passions,’ we need not commit to a strong thesis such as this. McDowell’s point is that the virtuous and the merely continent perceive the situation differently, such that the virtuous person is sensitive to reason-giving considerations which are independent of his desires.

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For McDowell, the merely continent agent is distinguished from the virtuous agent in that it is motivated differently. Its motivation stems from its conception of how to live, which is the major premise in light of which the salient features of the present situation are seen as such. The major premise of the Aristotelian practical syllogism is better understood as a motivational self-concept: the virtuous agent is motivated to express and become the virtuous self that it is. Rather than being preconceived or fore-ordained, the motivational self concept is expressed and realised through virtuous action. Thus, ‘a conception of how to live shows itself, when more than one concern might issue in action, in one’s seeing, or being able to be brought to see, one fact rather than another as salient.’\footnote{McDowell, 1979: page 344.} The virtuous agent has a motivational self-concept that is to some extent independent of its desires, thus standing in contrast to the self-regarding desires of the merely continent agent.

McDowell’s account of the virtuous agent has clear parallels with Taylor’s notion of the strong evaluator, which is defined in contrast to the simple weigher of alternatives. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the strong evaluator is self-articulate in a way that the simple weigher is not: while reflection for the simple weigher terminates in the inarticulate experience that one thing is more attractive than another, the strong evaluator possesses a ‘vocabulary of worth’ which enables one conception of how to live to be articulated as superior to another. The superiority of any one conception cannot be articulated in absolute terms but only with reference to the whole life as one that is described in such terms as being integrated or noble or courageous or dedicated.\footnote{Taylor, C. 1985: page 25.} Taylor’s selection of criteria is significant: they are all virtues. Thus, there is a strong correlation between Taylor and McDowell: the strong evaluator, defined by its constitutive goods, can be compared with McDowell’s virtuous agent, defined by a motivational self-concept that is to some extent independent of its desires. The second-order desires of the virtuous agent cum strong evaluator, lacking in the simple weigher, are meaningful only against a background self-concept which motivates the virtuous self to express itself as such.

McDowell’s account provides the resources for a reconsideration of the question of the environmentally virtuous self. If this is a coherent notion, then some motivational
self-concept must be the basis for its selection of the salient features of the situations in which it finds itself. The environmentally virtuous self, if it is to be a substantial conception of the ecological self, is not the simple weigher of alternatives: if it were this, then the question of our relationship with the ecological entity would simply reduce to that of prudent self-interest. In order to avoid this reduction, we need to account for the environmentally virtuous self as one whose motivational self-concept allows it to select the salient features of the present situation in such a way as to express the environmentally virtuous self that it is. Whether or not we are able to do so, however, remains in question.

4.16. The impossible virtue of the ecological self.

In order to conceive of the self as environmentally virtuous, a motivational self-concept is required which enables virtuous action to be meaningful as such, and distinguished from the action of the merely continent agent. It is only the virtuous self that brings to the situations in which it finds itself a motivational self-concept that enables its selection of the salient features of the present situation in such a way as to express the environmentally virtuous self that it is. But its being environmentally virtuous, rather than simply virtuous per se, would seem to require that the salience it perceives in the situation be such that the good of the ecological entity, or indeed the ecosystem, is endorsed. If the environmentally virtuous self is to be a coherent concept, then it must see the situation in terms of the virtues by which it understands itself, and it is far from clear what it could mean for the self to understand itself in terms of a good which the ecosystem might be perceived to instantiate.

An essential connection between the good of the ecological entity and the self’s understanding of itself would seem to be required if the notion of the environmentally virtuous self is to be coherent. But it is not immediately clear that this essential connection exists. What is clear is that we cannot conceive of the self solely on the basis of a good which is external to it, since this would be inconsistent with the definition of virtue as Anscombe describes it, which requires that the aretaic notions of human excellence be fundamental, and therefore non-derivable from any external criteria. If the environmentally virtuous self is to be a coherent notion, then it must be
some facet of the virtuous self. It cannot be a stand-alone concept: it cannot stand in distinction to, or alongside the virtuous self. Moreover, we cannot account for the environmentally virtuous self solely on the basis of some notion of a specifically environmental virtue. This point is noted by Hull, who argues that environmental virtue ethics theorists ‘tend to reduce human excellence to green virtue or to ignore or misinterpret its connection to other excellences.’

Accounts of the environmentally virtuous self have sought to establish some basis upon which the self might be motivated to become the environmentally virtuous self by tethering the notion to some particular good such as intrinsic value. But it cannot be a valid move to assume an essential link between a particular type of virtuous self and a value which is instantiated by the ecological entity. While there is nothing inconsistent about the virtuous self who promotes the wellbeing of the ecological entity, we cannot understand there to be an internal relation between them, whereby the self would be unable to understand itself other than in terms of the good which it promotes. These accounts face the challenge that they must tether the notion of the virtuous self to one particular good which cannot be understood as internal to the practice of human life. Excellence and virtue are internal to the practice of human life, and while we might understand them as responses to agent-transcending goods such as the wellbeing of the ecological entity, it can only be circular to attempt to read some particular virtue back from some particular good, such that the good defines the self but the self is the means to realise the good.

If an account of the environmentally virtuous self is to succeed, then it must consider the question of how this might be realised as integrally part of realising the virtuous self. It is not enough simply to attempt to delineate specifically environmental virtues, nor is it clear that it is meaningful or possible to do so. Accounting for virtuous action on the basis of a conception of how to live is the crucial point which must be considered. But there are no accounts that do so.

McDowell’s account of the virtues enables us to see that it is only by practising the virtues that one becomes the virtuous self that one is. This we have seen in his notion

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of the motivational self concept, which is expressed and realised through virtuous action. It is the motivational self concept, or the major premise, which is the conception of how to live and which motivates virtuous action. Williams anticipates the point, observing that the intention to be virtuous is rarely the basis for virtue:

‘The person is described in terms of the virtue, and so are his or her actions. …But …it is rarely the case that the description that applies to the agent and to the action is the same as that in terms of which the agent chooses the action. ‘Just’ is indeed such a case, one of the few, and a just or fair person is one who chooses actions because they are just and rejects others because they are unjust or unfair. But a courageous person does not typically choose acts as being courageous, and it is a notorious truth that a modest person does not act under the title of modesty.’

The key point is that one is never motivated to become the virtuous self: rather, one is motivated to act virtuously per se on the basis of a conception of how to live.

We might still regard the actions of the environmentally sensitive individual to be laudable or praiseworthy to the extent that they might be exemplary or supererogatory. And indeed we might still regard the individual to be virtuous: she may express the virtuous person that she is by being sensitive to the needs of human and non-human others, as well as frugal in her consumption of natural resources. But her so doing is simply her expressing herself as a virtuous a self, not as the environmentally virtuous self. The virtues she expresses are none other than the very same ones which any virtuous self will express. Indeed, this is also true of the individual whose action in dealing with the ecological entity is motivated by prudent self-interest: prudence per se can be considered to be among the virtues. The latter case demonstrates the key point: namely, that construing the self as the virtuous self does not contribute in any meaningful way to our understanding what it could mean to be, or aspire to become the ecological self.

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344 Williams, 1985: page 10.
4.17. Reconsidering the ecological self.

The ecological self has proven to be elusive. Indeed, the concept of the ecological self has proven to be incoherent, since it denotes a self which is unable to understand itself in terms of the excellence which defines it, which latter cannot be understood to be internally part of selfhood. The failing of the notion is that it proves to be an empty concept: we can find therein no meaningful way of relating ourselves to this idealised notion of selfhood. Our conclusion must be that the task of selfhood cannot be understood in terms of realising the ecological self, and the latter must be discounted as a spurious notion.

Our initial question was whether the SEE might be understood as integrally part of the moral orientation of the self, and therefore integrally part of the task of selfhood. We have yet to fully understand just what that task entails. But it is clear that this task must amount to something much more than simply setting it upon ourselves to become someone or something other, to become some idealised self. To assume that this is desirable or possible is simply to assume a Pelagian conception of selfhood. It is clear that we need a fuller account of the task of selfhood. To understand just what this pre-philosophical task might consist in is the philosophical task to which we now turn.
5. Kierkegaard, the task of selfhood, and the task of articulation.

5.1. Introduction.

This chapter explores the question of how we might understand selfhood as a task. The aim in so doing is to understand whether articulating the significance of the ecological entity (the SEE) might be understood as integrally part of this task. But it is only on the basis of understanding how any self is tasked with being a self that this latter question can be meaningfully addressed. To this end, Kierkegaard’s notion of the self as a task is explored.

5.2. Reconsidering the SEE: a question for the self, or of the self.

We have sought to understand the basis upon which we might work towards attaining a fuller or more integrated relationship with the ecological entity. It is now clear that if we are to understand this basis in any substantial way, thus as more than a matter of prudent self-interest, then we must understand it in terms of the constitution of the self. But it is also clear that this cannot mean that some idealised conception of the self should form this basis. It is meaningless to claim that we could or should aspire to become the ecological self, because we cannot relate ourselves to this notion in any meaningful way. This, as we have seen, is a problematic notion because the self is conceived in terms of a good to which it would aspire, but which cannot be understood as essentially part of itself. We cannot identify with this conception of the self or understand it as a facet of ourselves: we can relate ourselves only to that which is internally part of being a self, such as excellence or virtue. The basis we seek for a more integrated relationship with the ecological entity must be internally part of being a self, thus integrally part of the constitution of the self. If we cannot understand there to be such a basis, then a renewed relationship with the entity could have its basis in nothing more than prudent self-interest.
Excellence and virtue are most readily understood to be the aretaic notions which are internal to the self. And indeed it is these which Anscombe claims are needed to reanimate the ethical by connecting it with the notion of selfhood. However, we have seen that we cannot understand there to be a specifically ecological or environmental excellence or virtue. Therefore, if these notions can be understood to pertain in any way to our relationship with the ecological entity, then it is the virtuous self *per se*, not the *environmentally* virtuous self, that we would need to understand. We would need to understand *any* self, not some particular or idealised self such as the ecological self, as constituted in such a way that the potential to establish a fuller or more balanced relationship with the ecological entity is integrally part of this constitution. But it is not clear that this is necessarily the virtuous self: virtue is not the only means by which we might understand selfhood to be internally related to some conception of the good. The question remains as to how we might reanimate the notion of selfhood as a basis for a renewed relationship with the ecological entity, and indeed whether we are able to do so.

While Anscombe contends that the classically aretaic notions of virtue or excellence are necessary if the notion of selfhood is to be reanimated in such a way that we can understand it as a basis for our being ethical, we have begun to see that Anscombe’s formulation of the way in which selfhood is essentially related to the good is perhaps too limiting a conception, and is therefore one to which we need not be beholden. We have seen some suggestion in the last chapter that Taylor’s notion of the constitutive relation between self and good invites a wider interpretation than Anscombe’s. Indeed, we have seen that it is far from clear that the notions of virtue and excellence can meaningfully obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity. But Anscombe’s key point that selfhood must be understood in some essential relation with the good must nevertheless still apply to the question of our relationship with the ecological entity. Thus, should there be some basis for a fuller or more balanced relationship, then this basis must be essential to the self’s being the self that it is. This basis must be immanently a matter of our understanding of ourselves, thus in some way coordinate with, or perhaps analogous to the notions of excellence or virtue.

The possibility remains that our establishing a renewed relationship with the ecological entity can never have as its basis anything more than prudent self-interest.
Should this be so, this does not change the fact that our working towards this renewed relationship must begin with our understanding of ourselves. But our self-understanding would be engaged in this instance in only the most rudimentary of senses, whereby we would understand our relationship with the ecological entity as engaging nothing more than our material, and perhaps recreational needs. These would be met by exploiting the (instrumentally valuable) ecological entity, and we could aspire to nothing more than to minimise or otherwise mitigate the impact of this exploitation. Our succeeding in so doing would hardly amount to excellence in any substantial sense: indeed, mere continence would be a more accurate description of that to which we might aspire to attain. Selfhood would be engaged in only the most rudimentary of senses, and only by the most rudimentary of goods, which latter would be the SEE understood to be nothing more than instrumental valuing.

It is a crucial point that selfhood is engaged in a substantial sense only when the question of its self-understanding is engaged. This, as we have seen, is built into the notion of the task of being ethical as a task of articulation, whereby this is the task of articulating those goods in terms of which we understand ourselves. But if the SEE is not among these, then we could not account for the subtle and inchoate dimensions of the SEE as being essentially or intrinsically part of our relationship with the ecological entity. In this case, the question of how we should understand the SEE would not engage the question of how we understand ourselves, and would therefore be a question for the self, but not of the self. That is, there would be and could be no dealings with the ecological entity that might impact upon our understanding of ourselves in such a way that this latter might be called into question, or become an issue which we would feel compelled to confront.

An issue which impacts upon our understanding of ourselves is one which demands that we make sense of it: as Taylor has shown, such an issue is one about which we cannot be ambivalent. To confront such an issue is to raise a question which is not only for the self, but of the self in a substantial way: ultimately, we could say that to

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345 Godfrey-Smith argues that instrumental valuing in these various senses is sufficient to justify the preservation of wilderness. Fox elaborates this point. However, this does not change the fact that our stance towards the ecological entity is assumed to be exploitative in the first instance, and the constitution of the self is not considered. Godfrey-Smith, 1979; and also Fox, 1995: pp. 155-156.

be a self is to respond to this question. It remains to be seen whether our understanding the SEE might be such an issue. It is clear that its being so would necessarily mean that there would be much more to the SEE than mere instrumental valuing. But it is also clear that its being so would also mean that a richer understanding of the SEE would not be the exclusive preserve of the poet. Rather, the question of how the SEE should be understood would necessarily be one which any self would potentially confront, such that it could only be in bad faith that it would recognise this as a real question while failing to engage it fully.\textsuperscript{347} As we have seen, those issues about which we cannot be ambivalent are those in which personal identity is bound up.\textsuperscript{346} It is these issues which prompt questions of the self. Our question is whether our relationship with the ecological entity is one such.

5.3. Engaging an immanent task.

Our enquiry has brought us to the point where we need to explore the possibility that personal identity is bound up in a broader or more general sense than is accommodated by the notions of virtue and excellence. A possibility we might consider is that the SEE might somehow be conceived as a first-personal significance. However, it is far from clear as to how this might be understood in a substantial sense, such that it might be integrally part of establishing the basis for a renewed or redintegrated relationship with the ecological entity. In question is what it could mean to articulate the SEE as a first-personal significance: to conceive of this as being integrally part of our task of being ethical would seem to challenge the very notion of the ethical. Indeed, it would seem to reduce this task to the point where articulation of the meaningful content of our moral reactions would not be distinguishable from the expression of mere personal preference. However, we might also allow the possibility that our being ethical is integrally part of a broader task, and that first-personal significance might be the means to understand this task. Perhaps, indeed, this might be the task of selfhood.

\textsuperscript{347} If we consider the situatedness and historicity of the self, then we would need to concede that not every self will have the capacity to confront this question fully. Conceding this point, we might say, more rigorously, that this is a question which any self would potentially confront, or perhaps ultimately and ideally confront.
The possibility that a first-personal significance might be immanently part of our task of being ethical suggests the notion of personal authenticity. The notion of authenticity is a subject too large to be considered comprehensively in this study. Nevertheless, we can consider the possibility that some notion of authenticity may be the means to understand what it could mean to respond to those questions which are questions not only for the self, but immanently of it. To respond to such questions constitutes an ‘inner turn.’ Taylor associates this turn with Herder, who observes that ‘each of us has an original way of being human, [that] each person has his or her own ‘measure’.”

Authenticity might be understood as the task of each individual to find his or her own measure; as such, it can also be described as the task of self-determining freedom. Notions of self-determining freedom take many and various forms: for Rousseau and Mill it takes political form, for Hegel and Marx it takes historical form, while for Kant it takes moral form. From Nietzsche’s Übermensch to Sartre and Camus, the notion of authenticity has been interpreted in various ways. My being authentic is my finding my own measure; it is ‘my finding the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity.”

We need not consider the many ways in which authenticity has been described. We need only be concerned with a possibility which the notion of authenticity presupposes: to assume that authentic selfhood is a meaningful aspiration must be to assume that selfhood, per se, is never fixed or simply given. While the tradition has by no means had a univocal notion of authenticity or always assumed that authentic selfhood can ever actually be attained, it has regarded it as a meaningful notion and aspiration nevertheless. The key point is that authentic selfhood is never guaranteed, and must instead be attained. The assumption must be that selfhood can never be assumed: rather, it must always be something which we must work with, and work towards. In other words, the self can (indeed, must) be understood as a task.

While first-personal significance is a notion which points us in the directions of authentic selfhood, this does not indicate that it is necessarily an inherent part of the

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350 This we might understand, perhaps loosely, as having begun with Kierkegaard’s reaction to the abstract rationalism of Hegel’s philosophy and having developed into the contemporary strands of existentialism and phenomenology.
task of selfhood. Whether or not it is integrally part of this latter task remains to be seen. Our aim in addressing this question is to understand whether or not articulating the SEE as a first-personal significance might be understood to be integrally part of this task. Indeed, we might allow the possibility that first-personal significance will turn out to be essential to understanding this task. However, it is clear that generalisations such as the ecological self can contribute nothing to understanding this task. Rather than being a matter of reducing selfhood to an abstraction or to a reified self, this task must be one of engaging a potential which is immanentely one’s own.

The self as a task is a classically Kierkegaardian notion: never something that is simply given, the self must be achieved. And it is questions of the self that are integrally part of this larger task: to be most fully a self is to respond to these questions, and our choosing to respond is our choosing to be most fully a self.

5.4. Choosing the self.

Kierkegaard’s notion of the task of selfhood begins with a choice. Thus, the Kierkegaardian choice is between the ethical life and the aesthetic life. It is in terms of this fundamental choice that we must understand the question of the SEE as a question of the self, if articulating the SEE as a first-personal significance is to be understood as integrally part of the task of selfhood. How this might be so, however, remains in question. It would be an attenuated reading of Kierkegaard to simply identify ‘the ethical’ with our arriving at some more wholesome relationship with the ecological entity, and its ongoing unreflective exploitation as ‘the aesthetic’, thereby proclaiming that we should eschew the latter in favour of the former. We can now see that this would be to assume a simplistic and untenable sense of choice, perhaps a radical Pelagianism. Moreover, it is a sense of choosing to be ethical which is perhaps assumed by many of the accounts which have sought to establish principled foundations for our being environmentally ethical. It is clear that the choice of the ethical is not simply the choice of that which might be construed to be the morally good, and the Kierkegaardian choice must be understood to mean much more than this.

351 Rudd, 1993: page 75.
Kierkegaard (through his pseudonym Judge William) characterises the choice between the ethical and the aesthetic as an either/or. While we have yet to see just what he means by this, it is already clear that it must be more than choice in a simple or straightforward sense. To begin with, Judge William tells us that rather than being the choice between good and evil, the choice of the ethical is the choice to choose in terms of good and evil. Thus,

‘My either/or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil; it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil, or excludes them.’

The choice of the ethical is the choice of the ethical life, and this is defined in contrast to the aesthetic life. But we cannot take this to mean that the aesthetic life is one of being unreflective about matters of good and evil, or of failing to engage in evaluative judgement. ‘The distinction between the ethical and [a]esthetical does not turn simply on the activity or nonactivity of normative choice.’ Any mature person makes normative choices, and this must include the aesthete. Therefore, the either/or which articulates the transition away from the aesthetic life must mean more than the choice to make such choices.

A comparison between the aesthetic life and the ethical life affords us some insight into the nature of the Kierkegaardian choice. A preliminary characterisation of the aesthetic life would be that it lacks constancy of purpose due to lacking serious willing, therefore being a comparatively capricious life. Judge William tells us that this is a life of despair, and we can therefore understand the choice of the ethical as the choice to respond to this despair through the choice of a life that is more responsible. But its being more responsible must consist in more than the fact that it has been chosen: indeed, the life of the aesthete might also be understood as having in some sense been chosen. The key point is that the latter is representative of a failure to choose in terms of a higher end or telos, and thus is only ever chosen in terms of some more immediate end. It is only by understanding the ethical life in terms of some higher end that we can understand

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352 MacIntyre, 2002: page 41.
353 Either/Or II: p173 (emphasis added).
354 Mehl, 2005: page 17.
the either/or in the manner which Judge William surely intends, thus as that which enables genuinely responsible ethical behaviour. In order to distinguish the choice which is internal to such behaviour from the Kierkegaardian choice, Davenport draws a distinction between morally responsible choice (‘choice_e’), and the primordial choice of the ethical (‘choice_p’).

Internal to Judge William’s notion of choosing the ethical is the choice of selfhood. For Judge William, to ‘choose oneself’ is to choose to become a self. Thus, ‘He has himself as a task, in such a sort that the task is principally to order, cultivate, temper, enkindle, repress, in short to bring about a proportionality in the soul, a harmony, which is the fruit of the personal virtues.’

To choose to become a self must be in light of some understanding of the directedness or telos of selfhood: the choice can be a meaningful one only in light of something with respect to which one is able to understand oneself as orientated and situated. Thus, Judge William elaborates:

‘But although he himself is his aim, …the self which is the aim is not an abstract self, which fits everywhere and hence nowhere, but a concrete self which stands in reciprocal relations with these surroundings, these conditions of life, this natural order.’

Selfhood is not an abstraction for Judge William: in order to choose oneself, one must have some grasp of what it is that one is choosing. It is only with the choice_p of the ethical that this grasp of one’s immanent potential for selfhood is made possible.

While selfhood must be something more than an abstraction, something we must somehow be able to grasp, this does not entail that it is in any way foreordained. To choose the self is not merely to choose this or that self, or any particular self preconceived or foreordained, but to ‘apprehend oneself as having a potential for personhood.’ An immanent potential for selfhood is apprehended with the choice_p of the ethical: it is the potential for selfhood that sets the ethical apart from the aesthetic. Lacking constancy of purpose, the aesthetic life is defined by its lacking

357 Either/Or II: pp. 266-267.
358 If Judge William is providing us with an opening for a claim that the self does indeed stand some sort of relation to ‘the natural order’, which might perhaps include the environment, then we need to see how this is so, how it is part of the unfolding of selfhood.
any potential for self-directedness, and the aesthete might be understood as being lost in the present moment. It is a constancy of purpose, thus the potential for self-directedness, that defines the ethical life in contrast to the aesthetic life: since selfhood is never preconceived or foreordained, it is something that must be attained. The choice of the ethical life is the choice to commit to this immanent potential of selfhood, and the ethical life must therefore be one of long-term commitment. Selfhood is posited as an immanent possibility once the ethical life has been chosen, and an inherent directedness beginning with choice is the essence of the ethical life.

If the SEE might be understood as being in some way integrally part of our attaining to a potential which is immanently our own, thus part of the task of selfhood, then it is clear that the choice of the ethical life must involve attribution of more than prudential significance to the ecological entity. That is, if an attribution or appreciation of the SEE is integrally part of this choice, then this significance must be more than mere prudent self-interest. If the choice of the ethical life is to be integrally part of our establishing a fuller relationship with the ecological entity, then attaining to this renewed relationship must be understood as an immanent potential. Perhaps it is the potential to appreciate a richer sense of the SEE.

5.5. Understanding the significance of the primordial choice.

Reductionist readings of the Kierkegaardian choice assign it a foundational role without giving due consideration to the potential for selfhood that is internal to it and is indeed entirely the point. This is the hackneyed notion of criterionless choice: that the choice between the ethical and the aesthetic is ultimate, and the choice of the ethical is simply the unquestioning acceptance of its authority. MacIntyre interprets the Kierkegaardian choice in this decisionistic way:

‘Kierkegaard combines the notion of radical choice with an unquestioning conception of the ethical,’ where ‘the ethical is presented as that realm in which principles have authority over us independently of our attitudes, preferences and feelings.’

360 MacIntyre, 2002: page 43 (original emphasis).
361 MacIntyre, 2002: page 41.
According to this interpretation, one would choose the ethical simply because it is the ethical. Kierkegaard might be interpreted as supporting this view, telling us through his pseudonym Johannes de silentio that the ethical ‘rests immanently in itself.’ 362 Such an interpretation, however, is too quick, and in order to understand what Kierkegaard intends by the ethical, it is necessary to clearly understand the Kierkegaardian choice.

MacIntyre’s reading of Kierkegaard in terms of criterionless choice rests on the assumption that the distinctive philosophical task is to provide rational justification for morality. Provision of such a rational foundation was, according to MacIntyre, the task of the Enlightenment project, but this was a task at which it failed. For MacIntyre, the Kierkegaardian choice, is a response to this failure. Thus, ‘the act of choice has to be called in to do the work that reason could not do.’ 363 that is, to provide a substitute for the ‘rational vindication of morality.’ 364 For MacIntyre, since no foundation can be found, the either/or choice is ultimate, and the choice of the ethical therefore criterionless. 361 MacIntyre understands Kierkegaard’s move as the ultimate collapse of the Enlightenment project, or perhaps the ultimate collapse towards which it inherently tends: ‘Kierkegaard’s Either/Or is supposed to be the last gasp of the Enlightenment Project.’ 365

While our non-foundationalist approach concurs with MacIntyre’s dismissal of the attempt to provide rational foundations for the normative ought as an untenable approach to moral philosophy, his appropriation of Kierkegaard in support of his view is a misappropriation. Kierkegaard can be interpreted as providing a much more meaningful response to the failure of the Enlightenment to establish rational justification than the sense which MacIntyre is suggesting. Thus, the Kierkegaardian choice, can be interpreted in a way that undermines any need to provide this justification in the first place. Pace MacIntyre, Kierkegaard offers no clear definition of the ethical, and it is open to interpretation as to how he intends it to be understood. It is arguably the case that a set of principles having authority over us is not intended

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362 Fear and Trembling, page 62.
363 MacIntyre, 2002: page 47.
364 Davenport, 2001b: page 78.
365 Davenport, 2001b: page 79.
and that the authority of ethical notions, to which we must relate in the first person,\textsuperscript{366} is not something which will reduce to principles.\textsuperscript{367} For Kierkegaard, the ethical can only ever mean the task of being ethical, and an interpretation of what it means to be ethical must be a task that is both philosophical as well as pre-philosophical.

While the choice of the ethical cannot be based on a rational foundation and is not the outcome of philosophical insight, this does not entail that it is criterionless.\textsuperscript{368} The choice is the choice of selfhood, and if it were criterionless, this would suggest a self confronted with the choice but lacking any reason for choosing the ethical in preference to the aesthetic. Indeed, MacIntyre asks us to ‘suppose that someone confronts the choice between the ethical and the aesthetic, as yet having embraced neither.’\textsuperscript{369} For MacIntyre, the choice of the ethical is the choice to accept its authority. But this interpretation misses an essential point: the choice must be understood from the first-person perspective of the chooser. And from this perspective, either one is enjoined to choose the ethical life, or else one is an aesthete oblivious to the choice. Thus, ‘there is no sitting on the fence between selves. If you have not chosen, you are an aesthete, but if you are really facing the choice, you have already chosen to choose.’\textsuperscript{370} From the first-person perspective of the chooser, choice and selfhood are inseparable. As an immanent potential, selfhood is tied to a choice that can be neither arbitrary nor criterionless.

The Kierkegaardian choice must be understood as something much more than simply a self-conscious decision. It is a choice we never confront as such: to recognise the choice is to have already made it. Nevertheless, the choice is inseparable from selfhood, being the choice to recognise selfhood as an immanent potential. As such, it is a choice which cannot be arbitrary or criterionless, nor one for which there could be rational justification, since these terms do not apply to a choice we never confront.

Nor can they apply to a choice which is immanently a question of selfhood: personal

\textsuperscript{366} Lippitt observes that the intention behind Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous method is that we relate to ethical notions in the first person rather than seeking to derive a systematic morality from his writings. Lippitt, 2003: pp. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{367} Kierkegaard takes issue with systematic morality, and it is open to interpretation as to whether this latter is primarily Kantian or Hegelian. Mehl, 2001: pp. 7-12.
\textsuperscript{368} Critiques of MacIntyre’s reductionist reading of Kierkegaard are now well established. It is not within the scope of the present study to expound these critiques.
\textsuperscript{369} MacIntyre, 2002: page 40.
\textsuperscript{370} Marino, 2001: page 116.
identity is a matter which by definition is never arbitrary nor a matter of rational deliberation. The impossibility of sitting on the fence between selves is the impossibility of being confronted with the choice of alternative selves: we could not identify both alternatives as the self. Rather than a question of identifying something as the self, it is a question of identifying with it. Thus, ‘to make this choice ‘explicitly’ is to make it in the manner of a cognitively informed higher-order volition, an identification.’\textsuperscript{371} We identify with the potential for selfhood. By so doing, ‘the necessity of [ethical] choice is manifest.’\textsuperscript{372} From the first-person perspective, there is no choice in the matter.

The Kierkegaardian choice\textsubscript{p} proves to be a substantial notion, and one which we have yet to explicate fully. It is clear, nevertheless, that it can be said to be a question not so much for the self, but of it in a substantial sense. To understand the ethical in terms of this choice is therefore to understand it as something which is initiated by a volition of some sort, and while it is not yet clear what ‘a cognitively informed higher-order volition’\textsuperscript{371} might be, it is clear that the volition must be something prior to deliberative choice in which personal identity is implicated. To understand the ethical as initiated by this choice is to invite the possibility that the constitutive relation between the self and the good is central, such that the ethical is about our choosing in terms of the goods we are enabled to appreciate, rather than the authority of any principles which might determine our actions to be right or wrong. Indeed, the authority of such principles has nothing to do with our choosing the ethical: the aesthete would also be bound by their authority.

‘The aesthete’s particular actions may be judged right or wrong by himself or by a third party, but without the choice\textsubscript{p} to choose\textsubscript{c} in terms of the ethical, they are not grounded in the kind of inward character that can be good or evil in the fullest sense, and hence such actions cannot be internally motivated by these ethical distinctions.’\textsuperscript{373}

Thus, the Kierkegaardian choice\textsubscript{p} must be understood in terms of internal motivation.

\textsuperscript{371} Davenport, 2001b: page 93.
\textsuperscript{372} Either/Or II, page 182.
\textsuperscript{373} Davenport, 2001b: page 82.
5.6. The implications of the primordial choice.

To the extent that it emphasises the rational vindication for morality and separates it from the question of motive, MacIntyre’s interpretation of the Kierkegaardian choice, as criterionless must be understood as an externalist reading of Kierkegaard. Davenport describes this as the ‘aporia of externalism: if there is any reason for choosing the ethical as one's framework, then that reason cannot be the motive for doing so, since the choice is reasonless.’374 Our freedom to choose the ethical could only rob it of its authority over us; our freedom to choose the ethical could only rob us of our motive for respecting its authority. To construe the Kierkegaardian choice, as criterionless can only be a distortion of both the choice itself, and the ethical we would supposedly choose. We have already seen that the choice is one we never confront as such because it is not a matter of self-conscious deliberation. We need no external reason to make the choice, and indeed can appeal to none: external reasons cannot be relevant to a choice which is recognised as such only once it has been made.

In order to avoid the dilemma that results from an externalist reading of the Kierkegaardian choice, we need to reconsider Johannes’ statement that ‘the ethical rests immanently in itself.’362 Contrary to any externalist reading, this can be interpreted as a statement of internalism: thus, whatever is taken to be sufficient to confer normative status must also be such that it can motivate compliance on the part of the agent.375 That is, the reason for behaving ethically coincides with the motive for so doing, and appeal to any external end or authority is neither possible nor necessary. Kierkegaard’s internalism is that both reason and motive are internal to the choice of the ethical. That is, both the reason and the motive for any instance of the ethical choice are internal to the primordial choice. The latter, as we have seen, is never a matter of deliberation, and is therefore one for which reasons do not apply: to recognise the choice is to have already made it. The motivation for any instance of the ethical choice is internal to the primordial choice, while that which motivates the

374 Davenport, 2001b: page 78 (emphasis in original).
primordial choice, can only be a question of overcoming the shortcomings of the aesthetic life.

The aesthetic life is one of despair: it ‘makes impossible the development of a coherent sense of personal identity, and therefore one that makes personal fulfilment impossible.’ Kierkegaard distinguishes two kinds of aesthete: while both are unable to commit to any outlook which might amount to a constancy of purpose, the difference between these aesthetes is defined by the reasons for their inability.

‘Whereas the immediate aesthete … just acts on impulse, the reflective aesthete either fails to act at all because he reflects too much, or he reflects until he is sick of reflection, and then just acts on impulse anyway.’

Thus, while the immediate aesthete is simply unreflective, the reflective aesthete is aware of the many possibilities for assuming some direction in his life, but fails to act on them. What he lacks is a reason to commit to any of these possibilities, so that for the aesthete, the choice to commit can only be an arbitrary one. As such, it falls short of the primordial choice. It is only this latter which enables the constancy of purpose which the aesthetic life lacks by definition.

Kierkegaard’s dialectic of selfhood can be seen to involve a degree of reflexivity between the self and its choices: the self is determined by the choices it makes, while the choices it is able to make are a function of the selfhood that has been determined.

‘The choice itself is decisive for the content of personality, through the instant of choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen.’

By definition, the choice of the ethical is never arbitrary: as we have seen, to recognise this choice is to have already made it. By definition, the aesthete has not made this choice, having had no reason to do so; the aesthete who makes the choice either does so arbitrarily, thereby never in fact making the choice, or alternatively making the choice and thereby ceasing to be the aesthete. The identity of the chooser and the possibility of choice are inseparable: the primordial choice of the ethical is a moment of identification, in which the agent identifies with some positive potential for selfhood.

377 Rudd, 1993: page 70.
Commitment and identification are notions that must both be internal to the primordial choice of the ethical. Kierkegaard’s assertion that ‘through the instant of choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen’ can be interpreted as saying that the thing chosen in the primordial choice of the ethical is the potential for selfhood, and to make this choice must be to become immersed in that potential. To become immersed in the potential is simultaneously to identify with it as well as to become committed to its realisation; to identify with this potential is inescapably to commit to it, such that identification and commitment are the same moment. Thus, it is the notion of commitment, and the choice to assume it, that is the key to understanding the ethical life. Both reason and motive are internal to the primordial choice of the ethical, which can be understood as a moment of both commitment and identification.

5.7. Choosing the self, choosing commitment.

A constitutive relation can be seen to obtain between commitment and selfhood: it is only through commitment that the self is able to overcome the despair of the aesthetic life, which latter is defined by an inability to commit. However, commitment must mean much more than mere persistence, much more than merely fulfilling some role consistently. Genuine commitment is that in which personal identity is bound up, such that the commitment is one in which self-understanding is invested. Davenport elaborates the point that ethics for Kierkegaard needs to be understood in terms of the possibility of commitment:

‘Ethics is about first-person motivation, and therefore concerns the ‘personal horizon’ of possibilities for action with which character and choice are bound up.’

However:

‘Kierkegaard sees a decisive internal differentiation within this personal world [of possibilities]: …some of them, such as social roles and communal practices, can be engaged without real inward commitment, or first-person identification.’

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379 Davenport, 2001b: page 90.
It is *inward* commitment that must be elaborated in order to fully understand the ethical in terms of the primordial choice, and its implications.\(^{380}\) It is this sense of commitment that must stand in some substantial relationship to selfhood, indeed, a relationship which we might be able to understand as a constitutive relation.

‘Kierkegaard’s aim is to show that the natural tendency or ‘teleology’ of human selfhood …is towards choices that involve commitments,\(^{381}\) and thus ‘towards a meaningful exercise of the human capacity to define oneself in terms of what Harry Frankfurt has called *cares*, or what Bernard Williams has called *ground projects*. We become authentic selves in Kierkegaard’s sense only when we define ourselves in terms of such cares and projects.\(^{382}\)

Inward commitment implies identification, and this reiterates the earlier point that identification and commitment are the same moment, together integrally part of the primordial choice. To commit to something inwardly is to identify with it; conversely it can only be in bad faith that one identifies with something and then fails to make the commitment.

Inward commitment is a notion which can be understood as having an internal connection with the notion of significance. Commitment implies significance, but does not entail it. That is, to be inwardly committed to something is necessarily for it to have some first-personal significance: it is only in virtue of its significance for me that I am able to make such a commitment in the first place. But the converse does not hold: things need not gain first-personal significance simply because I make some commitment to them. My commitment may be conditional or partial or disingenuous: a conditional or compromised sense of commitment is one which might be made in order to gain some external end or outcome. Such a sense of commitment is clearly not one in which self-understanding is invested; personal identity is implicated in such a commitment in only the most trivial of senses, if at all. Genuine inward commitment corresponds to first-personal significance, and this must be significance in a sense much more substantial than that which might apply to the desirability or prudence of some external end or outcome that might be gained. The commitment

\(^{380}\) Davenport uses the term *volitional commitment*, suggesting some substantial sense of commitment which connects selfhood and significance as volitional undertakings. Davenport, 2001c: page 86.

\(^{381}\) Davenport, 2001a: page 290.

\(^{382}\) Davenport, 2001a: page 290. (Emphasis in original).
internal to the primordial choice, of the ethical can be no such conditional commitment, since the commitment is also a moment of identification, and therefore one that implies a genuine first-personal significance.

The notion of inward commitment might suggest a commitment that is necessarily unconditional or absolute. Being immanently part of the primordial choice, which is the choice of selfhood, the suggestion is that a commitment in which personal identity is bound up is one about which one could not be ambivalent. Judge William might seem to suggest as much:

‘But what is it I choose? Is it this thing or that? No, for I choose absolutely, and the absoluteness of my choice is expressed precisely by the fact that I have not chosen to choose this or that. I choose the absolute. And what is the absolute? It is I myself in my eternal validity.’

We need not, however, interpret Judge William as saying that an inward commitment must be an absolute or unconditional commitment. This is too strong a sense of commitment: as Chapter Two has shown, the inevitability of our allegiance being divided between conflicting values means that such a strong sense of commitment can only be an unattainable ideal. If ethics is to be understood in terms of the possibility of commitment, then a requirement for an untenably strong sense of commitment such as this can only mean that our being ethical is also rendered an unattainable ideal, and therefore an impossibility.

If we are to understand inward commitment to be integrally part of the primordial choice, then this can be neither a conditional commitment in the sense of being compromised or partial, nor an unconditional commitment in the sense of being absolute. Both are an unsatisfactory sense of commitment. The reason for their being so, however, is a question with which we need not be concerned: it cannot be our concern to understand inward commitment in terms of the degree of commitment that is called for. Our concern is to understand inward commitment in terms of the possibility that a constitutive relation that might obtain between commitment and selfhood. If the ethical is to be understood in terms of the possibility of inward commitment, then it must be a question of that which enables such commitment.

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Inward commitment is something we can understand, pre-philosophically as well as philosophically, only in terms of the cares and ground projects in which self-understanding is invested. It is in such cares and ground projects that we might find first-personal identification and by implication first-personal motivation.

5.8. Commitment and the ecological entity.

Commitment, significance, and identification turn out to be internally interconnected notions. This prompts the question of whether the significance of the ecological entity might, or indeed must, be understood in terms of this interconnection. If the evaluation which is the SEE is to be strong evaluation, then the potential for some strong, or indeed sincere, sense of commitment is surely implied. If it were necessarily a first-personal significance, this would suggest the need for an inward commitment on our part. Internal to such a commitment is first-personal identification, however we need to clarify just what this might consist in.

According to the deep ecologist, the identification that corresponds to the SEE is simply our identifying with the ecological entity, thereby becoming committed *ipso facto* to its well-being. But this, as we have seen, is a question-begging argument. There is no room left in this limited sense of identification for any real commitment, being one in which any choice involved is predetermined. Should there be any sense of the primordial choice, then it would only be the choice of a self which is foreordained, being the self which understands the ecological entity as an extension of itself. This is surely untenable: if we are to understand inward commitment to be integrally part of the primordial choice, then the choice of the self must be of an immanent potential for selfhood, not a foreordained self.

Any viable alternative to the untenable notion of identifying *per se* with the ecological entity must be based on inward commitment as a genuine undertaking. One such alternative is the trivial one in which our commitment to the ecological entity is motivated by prudent self-interest. As we have seen, the SEE is in this case an instrumental valuing, and our first-personal identification is with those attributes of the ecological entity that correspond to our needs and desires. But it is simply a
tautology to say that we have a commitment to prudent self-interest, and once again any sense of the primordial choice that might be implied is undermined by the fact that the choice is predetermined. If we are to account for any meaningful interrelationship between commitment and significance as it might pertain to the ecological entity, then this must be based upon the possibility of our making a genuine inward commitment. It is not immediately obvious, however, as to what form such a commitment might take. Nor indeed is it clear as to whether it is possible: the self whose stance towards the ecological entity is in part irreducibly instrumental may find itself irresolute in the commitments to the entity that it is able to make.

Inward commitment, as we have seen, can be understood in only in terms of the cares and ground projects in which self-understanding is invested. But we have yet to fully understand what these cares and ground projects might be. To do so is an undertaking that must be both pre-philosophical as well as philosophical, such that to understand these cares and projects is a question both for the self and of the self. Thus, ‘we become authentic selves in Kierkegaard’s sense only when we define ourselves in terms of such cares and projects.’ If the SEE is to be a question both for the self and of the self, then it must be a question for the self to understand this as being in some way integrally part of those cares and projects in which it is in fact immersed, those which are a question of the self to the extent that it defines itself in terms of them. The SEE’s being integrally part of these cares and projects must somehow have its basis in inward commitment. How this might be so is not yet clear.

To understand the SEE as a question both for the self and of the self cannot mean that it is a task for the self to understand itself as the ecological self. This foreordained outcome, as with any other outcome which is predetermined or foreordained, is untenable. Rather, it must be a question of the cares and projects in which the self is in fact immersed. Its being so immersed, never predetermined or foreordained, must be genuinely a question for it as well as of it. But nor is its being so immersed merely a matter of free choice: as Chapter Two has shown, we find ourselves already immersed in a meaningful context, already drafted into various roles. Our task of being ethical, the task of articulation, is to reinterpret those roles. Commitment must
nevertheless be integrally part of this process of reinterpretation: there must still be some sense of inward commitment as a volitional undertaking.

‘In Either/Or, morality is presented as something that arises with the willingness to make long-term commitments, to accept social roles, and by so doing, to accept the standards of evaluation that go with them.’

Accepting these standards of excellence is prerequisite to the roles being reinterpreted:

‘Only by committing to oneself to some project can one make the judgement that one is doing well or badly in it.’

5.9. Finding the freedom for inward commitment.

Inward commitment is not simply a matter of free choice: it means little if it is self-consciously chosen freely. If inward commitment and first-personal significance, and therefore also first-personal identification and first-personal motivation, are to be a question for the self and of the self, then this cannot be the disengaged self that chooses commitment from a position free of any prior interests or commitments. These various Kierkegaardian notions, all of them implicit in the notion of the primordial choice, are never a question of the self if this is the disengaged self. Such a self is one for whom commitment does not include identification because there is no immanent potential for selfhood enabled by the commitment. Commitment is therefore never inward commitment; the self needs some reason to make the commitment, which it may do conditionally. If the self is disengaged, we are unable to understand the notions of commitment, significance, identification and motivation as internally interconnected.

Once again, we would fall into the aporia of externalism if the self were thought of as disengaged. Such a self is one for whom first-personal identification and first-personal motivation do not coincide. The self is free to choose to commit or not, feeling no compulsion to do so in virtue of any first-personal identification and therefore first-personal significance. Commitment may be conditional, and the self

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384 Rudd, 1993: page 72.
385 Rudd, 1993: page 74.
needs some reason for undertaking it. But an external reason for making the
commitment must compromise it to the extent that it is not an act of identification,
and as such it is not an act of identifying with the ethical life as an immanent
potential. The self needs some reason to choose the ethical life, while it would
supposedly be motivated to be ethical simply because the ethical has authority. But
we have seen that both the reason and the motive for any instance of the ethical
choice\(_c\) must be internal to the primordial choice\(_p\), which latter is never a matter of
deliberation, and is therefore one for which reasons do not apply. The self which
chooses itself in the primordial choice\(_p\) must be the engaged self, being thereby
enabled to make inward commitment.

Inward commitment must be a matter of identification, not of deliberation. As we
have seen, the notions of inward commitment and significance are interconnected,
such that commitment implies significance but does not entail it. One does not
deliberate over matters of first-personal significance; significance is identified, not
chosen. But commitment must nevertheless be a volitional undertaking, and this must
be the Kierkegaardian choice that enables commitment. The role of choice, therefore,
is to enable first-personal significance, not to decide upon it through rational
deliberation. The volition implied by the notion of inward commitment, therefore, is
to be distinguished from reason and motive:

‘The role of the absolute existential choice [of the ethical] is to establish an
inward dimension of undissociable volition, which is distinct from an internal
desire or tendency to an end that is sufficient for acting.’\(^{386}\)

While not reducible to reasons or rationalisation, inward commitment is nevertheless
initiated by choice. This is the existential choice, the primordial choice\(_p\). And this
must be independent of reasons: as we have seen, to recognise the choice is to have
made it already. Being the choice of the self, it is necessarily a matter of first-
personal significance.

We are now in a position to better understand the point of self-choice in the
primordial choice\(_p\). Rather than choosing this or that commitment, the choice is one
of identifying with the immanent potential for selfhood which is enabled by our

\(^{386}\) Davenport, 2001b: page 83.
choosing a life of commitment, the ethical life. Thus, it is ‘not [the case] that we posit values or ways of life, but that we inwardly appropriate these through the commitments that make us ‘crystallised particulars’’.³⁸⁷ Far from being disengaged, the self finds itself already immersed in a meaningful context, already engaged in roles that demand that it engage in their reinterpretation; what is demanded is a re-engagement. Inward commitment is this re-engagement. As such, inward commitment is to a network of values that are to be perpetually tested and revised, and the only way to do so is to throw the self, wholly and wholeheartedly, into the question. This question, ultimately, is Socrates’ question. The question of how one should live is a question of self-integration and commitment, such that we ‘wholeheartedly desire to be wholehearted.’³⁸⁸

Davenport draws an analogy between the self that engages Socrates’ question through commitment and the individual who undertakes to learn and master a skill. He draws an analogy with the learner driver: the person who decides to become a competent driver is analogous to the self that chooses the ethical life.³⁸⁹ For the learner driver, knowledge of the road rules is necessary but not sufficient: in order for these to be genuinely action-guiding for the individual, an inward commitment is necessary. The individual who knows the road rules but never undertakes to learn to drive is analogous to the aesthete, whose inability to make commitments defines him as such. His inability to commit has nothing to do with the authority of the ethical, just as the individual’s never undertaking to learn to drive has nothing to do with the authority of the road rules. It is not the commitment that renders these rules authoritative, but rather that commitment gives them personal relevance. In other words, first-personal significance is enabled by the inward commitment.

It is the engaged self for whom first-personal significance is a possibility, this being enabled by its capacity for inward commitment. This capacity is its capacity for self-understanding: an ability to re-interpret the roles and cares and ground projects in which it finds itself immersed presupposes a degree of self-understanding. Its reason and motivation for undertaking this task coincide; identification and significance.

³⁸⁸ Frankfurt, 1999: page 106.
³⁸⁹ Davenport, 2001b: pp. 87-88.
motivation and reason all coincide in the primordial choice, And it is this choice, the choice of self, which is the identification with an immanent potential for selfhood and which enables self-understanding. For MacIntyre, this freedom for self-understanding is a Kantian freedom;

‘[A Kantian freedom] can only ‘abstract’ and ‘disengage’ the agent. For Kierkegaard, precisely the opposite is true: it is only the freedom of pure self-commitment that makes it possible for the varied phenomena of social life to gain real first-personal significance in the first place.’

The freedom of pure self-commitment is to be distinguished from a Kantian freedom. It is freedom from external reasons: a pure self-commitment is an unencumbered commitment, unencumbered by reasons that demand or justify its being undertaken.

5.10. A twofold task of coherence.

Prerequisite to some phenomenon being of first-personal significance is that the agent have the freedom of commitment independent of reasons. This freedom, however, may come at a price. This is that the individual may not be able to communicate or express this sense of significance in such a way that it can be understood: being a first-personal significance, it may be different things to different individuals, carrying an individual imperative possibly understood only by the individual. Such an imperative would be non-universalisable; there would be no requirement that the imperative apply universally, and nor any guarantee that it would be universally understandable. Potentially a matter of higher-order evaluation and therefore not necessarily reducible to deliberation and rationalisation, first-personal significance is not bound to reason-giving. First-personal significance may be irreducibly for the first person: independence of reason-giving might entail the possibility not only that one might struggle to make oneself understood, but that one might find oneself incapable of so doing.

The possibility of being understood is a pivotal point in Kierkegaard’s account of the task of selfhood. He suggests that it is integrally part of this task to become coherent and understandable and fully transparent unto oneself, and that this is initiated in the choice of the ethical life. This he contrasts with the aesthetic life as follows:
‘The principal difference, and one on which everything hinges, is that the ethical individual is transparent to himself... This difference states the whole case. He who lives ethically has seen himself, [and] knows himself.’\textsuperscript{390}

The task of selfhood is to become a self, which is the task of ‘bring[ing] about a proportionality in the soul, a harmony;\textsuperscript{391} thus, the task of selfhood is one of integration and coherence, such that:

‘He who has ethically chosen and found himself possesses himself as he is determined in his whole concretion.’\textsuperscript{392}

The task of coherence is the task of becoming a coherent self, coherent unto itself in its constancy of purpose. It is this constancy of purpose that defines the ethical life.

The coherence and constancy of purpose that defines the ethical life is that which enables its being an agent in ‘the sphere of the ethical.’\textsuperscript{393} Kierkegaard associates the ethical with the universal: through Johannes de silentio he tells us that ‘the ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone,’\textsuperscript{394} while through Judge William he tells us that ‘the ethical is the universal’\textsuperscript{395} and that ‘the beauty of the universal consists precisely in the fact that all can understand it.’\textsuperscript{396} While we clearly cannot extract from this any sort of definition of the ethical, it can be read as equating the ethical sphere with being understandable.\textsuperscript{397} Thus,

‘The universal is, minimally, what can be understood by all, that which contains no arbitrary exclusions or inclusions which would depend upon various kinds of partiality or accidental features.’\textsuperscript{398}

In order to be ethical, one must be understandable as such: the task of coherence is the task of becoming understandable. This can be interpreted as a twofold task: to be coherent as a self is to be both internally and externally coherent, thus coherent unto oneself as well as in the sphere of the ethical.

\textsuperscript{390} Either/Or II: pp. 262-263.
\textsuperscript{391} Either/Or II: page 267.
\textsuperscript{392} Either/Or II: page 266.
\textsuperscript{393} Rudd, 1993: page 134.
\textsuperscript{394} Fear and Trembling, page 62.
\textsuperscript{395} Either/Or II: page 259.
\textsuperscript{396} Either/Or II: page 342.
\textsuperscript{397} Lippitt, 2003, writes: ‘Though the term ‘universal’ has different resonances in Kant and in Hegel, both insist that ethical demands are, in some sense, universal, and that reason requires us to submit to these demands.’ (Page 89).
\textsuperscript{398} Lillegard, 2001: page 223.
The potential incommunicability of first-personal significance prompts the question as to whether such a thing can play any meaningful part in our task of articulation, the task of being ethical. It is by following Kierkegaard that we can now understand this to be the task of selfhood, a task which begins with the choice of the self in the choice of the ethical life. The primordial choice is the point of coincidence of identification, motivation, significance and commitment. However, we would now seem to face the paradox that the significance internal to this choice of the ethical, being a first-personal significance, is incommunicable in the sphere of the ethical. The ethical would seem to contain its own negation. Thus, the question of the limits of the ethical is prompted. If this question is a genuine one, then it will be one which will inevitably be confronted as the task of selfhood unfolds, and while it may not be a question which the self will self-consciously confront as such, it will be intrinsic to the choice of the self to the extent that it is integrally part of the immanent potential with which the self has chosen to identify.

A Hegelian dialectic is suggested by the possibility that the ethical might contain its own negation. The suggestion might be that some process of immanent negation might resolve the paradox that the significance internal to the choice of the ethical, being a first-personal significance, is incommunicable in the sphere of the ethical. However, Kierkegaard is emphatic that a process of Hegelian mediation does not apply. Mocking the progression of the Hegelian dialectic (through his pseudonym Constantin Constantius), he observes that ‘one tries in vain to count 1,2,3.’\textsuperscript{399} He leaves us to fill in the blanks here: we can assume that he intends this to denote Hegel’s three stages of position, negation and mediation. But nor will any process of Platonic recollection\textsuperscript{400} satisfy Kierkegaard: both this and the Hegelian dialectic generalise the process of becoming ethical.\textsuperscript{401} To do so is surely at odds with Kierkegaard’s project to establish the ethical as an individual undertaking: \textsuperscript{402} ‘Perfectly general or universal schemes of moral advance bury the crucial factor of individual choice, of personal decision in moral progress; the goal of

\textsuperscript{399} Repetition, page 151.
\textsuperscript{400} This point is discussed below.
\textsuperscript{401} Mooney, 1998: pp. 286-287.
\textsuperscript{402} This reiterates the point made earlier, that Kierkegaard takes issue with systematic morality, whether this be Hegelian or Kantian, or indeed Platonic.
assimilation is a tawdry substitute for the proper goal of continuing individuation.\(^{403}\)

To generalise the ethical is at odds with the fact that the choice of the ethical was the choice of the self, and to re-examine the ethical, therefore, is to re-visit the choice of the self. The choice of the ethical, being the choice of the self, can be understood as the first step in a process of individuation. As Mooney indicates, the proper goal of this choice is continuing individuation. The task of selfhood does not stop with the choice of the ethical life; on the contrary, this task has only begun with the initiating existential choice, the primordial choice.\(^p\) The task of being ethical therefore has two facets: it is the (twofold) task of coherence, as well as the task of individuation:

‘Humans seek wholeness and completion as well as difference.’\(^{404}\)

Again, this reiterates an earlier point: that each of us has an original way of being human, our own ‘measure.’ Our task, understood as the task of selfhood or the task of authenticity, is to find this measure.

**5.11. A new either/or.**

It is incumbent upon the self that has chosen the ethical to revisit this choice. Being the choice of a life which is one of inward commitment, the choice of the ethical enables phenomena to be invested with first-personal significance. But this must be reconciled with understanding the ethical as instantiating some sense of universalisability, since ‘the ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone.’\(^{394}\) In question is whether a purely first-personal significance can be understood as part of the task of articulation, the task of being ethical, which is the task of self-coherence. Ultimately, it is a question of the limits of the ethical.

The question of the limits of the ethical might be understood in different senses. Matters of first-personal significance bring us up against this question, and the SEE is potentially one such. In one sense, to raise the question of the limits of the ethical might be to consider whether matters of first-personal significance should simply be

\(^{403}\) Mooney, 1998: page 286.

excluded. This, however, is a very limited sense in which the question of the limits of the ethical might be engaged. If we are to understand this question in a sense which is genuinely meaningful and substantial, then it must be integrally part of the choice of the self. Only thus might it be integrally and indeed essentially part of Kierkegaard’s overall project. Thus, in order to raise this question in the substantial sense which he surely intends, we might ask whether the choice of the ethical in the primordial choice, is sufficient to accommodate the full potential of the task of selfhood, or whether this is merely the first step in a task which is ongoing.

If the question of the limits of the ethical is to be engaged in the substantial sense which Kierkegaard intends, thus in a sense which is integrally part of the choice of the self, then it is clear that it cannot be a simple matter of circumscribing something which applies universally. Along with Hegelian mediation and Platonic recollection, an approach such as this would be one of generalising or universalising the possibility of moral advance, thereby burying the crucial factor of individual choice. The self which chooses the ethical life cannot be bound to choose something with predetermined limits: this would rob the self of its freedom of choice, robbing it of its potential to identify with an immanent potential of its own making. Ultimately, it would rob the self of the freedom to choose itself. To address the question of the limits of the ethical in this way is to assume that the point of the choice of the ethical is ultimately one of assimilation, and this, as we have seen, cannot substitute for the proper goal of continuing individuation. The question must, therefore, be that of how the choice of the ethical in the primordial choice, is merely the first step in an ongoing task of selfhood.

The question of the limits of the ethical cannot be an ethical dilemma: rather, it is a question of the limits of ethical deliberation. As such, it cannot be a matter over which one might deliberate; the self does not deliberate over its ability to deliberate. It is therefore a question which the self never confronts as such: as with the primordial choice, it is a matter of identification, not of deliberation, whereby to confront the choice is to have already made it. It is a new either/or, which, like the either/or choice between the aesthetic and the ethical, is a call to selfhood, an injunction to choose oneself. Selfhood must be engaged as an ongoing task, and it is first-personal significance that both enables and requires this ongoing task to be undertaken. To the
extent that it is potentially a first-personal significance, and as such more than a matter of deliberation and rationalisation and thus incommunicable in the sphere of the ethical, the SEE enjoins us to engage this ongoing task.

The new either/or is the injunction to revisit the original choice of the self which was the primordial choice. The self must choose itself again, and it must choose again in the spirit of the original choice, which is to identify with the immanent potential for selfhood. But to remain faithful to the original choice would seem to require that the self choose to remain in the sphere of the ethical, and therefore to turn away from acknowledging the first-personal significance that has brought it to this new either/or. However, the either/or is not a choice over which one might deliberate. Indeed, to deliberate over first-personal significance as a question of value is already to have chosen the ethical, and therefore to have already foreclosed on the question of the limits of the ethical. It is already to have turned away from the new either/or. To genuinely choose in the spirit of the primordial choice is to identify with the immanent potential for selfhood; again, as before, to recognise the choice which is the new either/or is to have already made this choice.

The self which revisits its choice of the self, thereby questioning the limits of the ethical, can no longer be understood to be acting in accordance with the ethical life. Its stepping up to the either/or is its affirmation of its immanent potential for selfhood; contained therein is potentially its ability to choose in terms of first-personal significance. Its so choosing cannot necessarily be understood to be choosing ethically: the first-personal significance which informs its choosing is not necessarily communicable in the sphere of the ethical. Its choosing in terms of first-personal significance, enabled by its having made the choice, is nevertheless not recognisable as choice, as such, we might call it ‘choice.’ Its reasons for so choosing are not necessarily understandable; reason is silent on the question of choosing in terms of first-personal significance.

While the self that makes the choice, cannot be understood to be choosing ethically, its so choosing must nevertheless be on the basis of its understanding itself as able to

405 This sense of non-deliberative choice can be interpreted as part of Kierkegaard’s intention in characterising the choice of selfhood as the either/or.
so choose. Any instance of the ethically responsible choice, is made on the basis of the self understanding itself as ethical and therefore able to choose ethically.

Similarly, the self’s making the choice, must be on the basis of its understanding itself as so enabled. Such a self is one who has confronted the new either/or, however not as an ethical dilemma; the self’s confronting this new either/or cannot be understood in terms of its being divided between allegiance to the ethical, and allegiance to some higher calling. As before, there is no ‘sitting on the fence between selves.’ The self cannot be understood as the tragic hero. Indeed, it cannot necessarily be understood at all:

‘The tragic hero, the darling of ethics, is a purely human being, and he is someone I can understand, someone all of whose undertakings are in the open. If I go further I always run up against the paradox, the divine and the demonic; for silence is both of these. It is the demon’s lure, and the more silent one keeps the more terrible the demon becomes; but silence is also divinity’s communion with the individual.’

5.12. Suspending the ethical.

The silence of reason, ‘divinity’s communion with the individual,’ is for Kierkegaard the basis of the call to move beyond the ethical. To move beyond the ethical, however, cannot be understood as a deliberate undertaking: to deliberate is to remain within the sphere of the ethical. The question of the limits of the ethical, which the self confronts as an either/or, is the possibility of suspending the ethical. To realise this possibility, however, is not something which the self can self-consciously choose to do: its choosing is only ever on the basis of its understanding of itself, and its choice is therefore either choice, or choice, . Its making the choice, would be to identify with the ethical life, thereby turning away from the immanent potential for selfhood which lies beyond the ethical, while its making the choice, would be on the basis of having already suspended the ethical. The crucial point is that this must be understood as a teleological suspension of the ethical, such that the self chooses in terms of its absolute telos. For Kierkegaard, the absolute telos of any individual is

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406 Fear and Trembling: page 106.
408 Rudd, 1993: page 148.
to bring oneself into the right relationship with God, and the new either/or is the transition from ethics to religion.

Through his various pseudonyms, Kierkegaard offers several alternative formulations of his notion of the teleological suspension of the ethical. His later works elaborate upon his earlier formulations of this transition to the religious life, and all can be regarded as being experimental to a varying extent.409 Mehl understands Kierkegaard’s overall intention in these explorations as showing that one cannot be a Christian simply by virtue of living in a society where Christian attitudes and values are held,410 or in other words, that one’s calling oneself a Christian demands that one work out for oneself what this actually means and how it should be embodied. Kierkegaard’s formulation of the transition from the ethical is open to endless interpretation, and it is beyond the scope of this study to compare and contrast the various possibilities with which Kierkegaard experiments. Nevertheless, the task of selfhood can be understood in terms of a general dialectic of self-choice through self-identification which is not bound to any foreordained outcome. The more general point is that the individual’s absolute telos may not be known; this the individual must discover for himself, within himself.411 Whether or not this must be understood in terms of a relationship to God is for the individual to discover.

For Kierkegaard, the biblical story of Abraham exemplifies the teleological suspension of the ethical. At God’s behest, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son. We cannot understand his actions as ethical, and therefore must seek to understand him as acting on the basis of understanding himself as a man of God.

‘In his action he overstepped the ethical altogether, and had a higher telos outside it, in relation to which he suspended it.”412

By situating himself in an unmediated relation to God and thereby choosing in terms of his absolute telos, Abraham represents the ‘knight of faith.’413

409 The distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical, introduced by Johannes de silentio in Either/Or, is elaborated by Johannes Climacus in Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments.
410 Mehl, 2001: page 27.
412 Fear and Trembling: pp. 68-69.
413 Fear and Trembling, passim.
‘Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son makes him a hero of faith, although, on ethical grounds, he must be regarded simply as a murderer.’

Through Johannes, Kierkegaard explores the possibility of understanding Abraham’s actions, however this proves to be no easy task: ‘the unsolvable riddle of Abraham’ is his impenetrable interiority. There are no heroic, other-worldly traits which give away the knight of faith, who ‘looks just like a tax-gatherer.’ To explicate the details of the intricate tale of Abraham is beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, we can take from it the point that self-understanding is something to be attained, as well as something which enables our choosing in terms of it, but the choice, thereby enabled may be an irreducibly first-personal matter.

Representing the teleological suspension of the ethical, the knight of faith is contrasted with the tragic hero. While Kierkegaard explores other possible alternatives to the tragic hero, it is his exploration of the knight of faith that is his means of articulating the move beyond the ethical.

‘The tragic hero renounces himself in order to express the universal; the knight of faith renounces the universal in order to be the particular.’

Never stepping up to the either/or which is the move beyond the ethical, the tragic hero can always be understood. The knight of faith, however, is the Archimedean point in the question of the possibility of being understood.

‘Abraham’s whole action stands in no relation to the universal, it is a purely private undertaking. While, then, the tragic hero is great through his deed’s being an expression of the ethical life, Abraham is great through an act of purely personal virtue.’

The knight of faith’s suspension of the ethical is his placing himself outside it, thus in an unmediated relation to his absolute telos. Johannes tells us that ‘the single individual is higher than the universal;’ it is only the knight of faith that is able

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414 Rudd, 1993: pp. 143-144.
417 Fear and Trembling: page 42.
418 In Fear and Trembling, the alternatives are the knight of resignation and the knight of faith; in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, these figures are developed further as ‘Religiousness A’ and ‘Religiousness B.’
419 Fear an Trembling: page 90.
420 Fear and Trembling: page 82.
to understand himself in terms of his absolute telos and therefore to choose in terms of it.

A ‘purely personal virtue’, placing the individual ‘higher than the universal’, might be read as suggesting a virtue or ‘character-based ethic.’421 The suggestion might be that understanding the ethical in terms of the universal is untenable, and that a renewed understanding of the ethical is called for:

‘This deeper picture of the ethical is one that takes agents or character, rather than acts or principles, as primary.’422

However, we must be cautious of such an interpretation, and indeed Lippitt warns us that it cannot be assumed that this straightforward interpretation is valid.422 A reinterpretation of the ethical as a character-based ethics is not what is called for in the teleological suspension of the ethical: while the knight of faith may be able to understand himself in terms of his absolute telos and therefore to choose in terms of it, this is not recognisable as the morally responsible choice.

‘Thus the ethical, understood as the universal, the public, cannot accommodate Abraham. Hence Johannes claims that we need a new category for understanding Abraham, a category …in which an individual’s relationship to God can be private and …unmediated.’423

While the knight of faith may be able to understand himself in terms of his absolute telos and therefore to choose in terms of it, the key point is that arriving at such a self-understanding is not a matter of effort or willpower. The individual’s absolute telos is something which he must discover for himself, within himself,411 and this self-understanding cannot be deliberately brought about. Thus, it is an essential point in Johannes’ understanding of the transition to the religious life that some sort of ‘bestowal,’ be it God’s grace or some other transcendent intervention, is necessary. The individual is unable to realise his telos by his own efforts.424 This is clearly inconsistent with interpreting Johannes’ statement that ‘the single individual is higher than the universal’420 as the call for a character-based ethics, since it is surely axiomatic to the notion of virtue ethics that being virtuous and therefore ethical is
something that one can realise by one’s own efforts. Rather than being a matter of individual virtue, the individual is higher than the universal in virtue of having discovered within himself an absolute telos which is outside of himself.

A new category is needed in order to understand the move beyond the ethical, since the new either/or which articulates this transition cannot be understood as a purely volitional undertaking on the part of the individual. The new either/or would seem to radicalise the notion of the choice of the self: rather than being a choice self-consciously made, it seems to hint at the possibility that the self finds itself having been chosen. This, however, need not necessarily be understood in terms of the religious life, since the absolute telos is a matter for the individual to discover.

‘To journey out beyond ethics is to find oneself alone – perhaps with God, perhaps just alone.’

5.13. Repetition.

The self must revisit its original choice of itself, and in the spirit of this choice, must choose itself again. It must face a new either/or, which is never a matter of deliberative choice, but is instead to identify with an immanent potential for selfhood. While the primordial choice was in response to the despair inherently part of the aesthetic life, the new either/or is a question of the limits of the ethical, and the self’s ability to choose in terms of first-personal significance. Selfhood is an ongoing task of identifying with an immanent potential. However, the question of the limits of the ethical has introduced a new element: the possibility that some sort of transcendent intervention must be considered. Whether this might be God’s grace or some other form of ‘bestowal’ is for the individual to discover; Mooney suggests that it may be a purely secular experience such as an encounter with the sublime. Whether or not we (as individuals or as philosophers) can recognise such things as taking us beyond the ethical, the point remains that the new either/or would seem to introduce the possibility that the fullest potential of selfhood might be more than an immanent

potential. Transcendent intervention presupposes transcendence, that is, non-immanence.

As we have seem, Kierkegaard is emphatic that the process of becoming ethical is not a process of Hegelian mediation nor one of Platonic recollection, since these perfectly general schemes are irreconcilable with the crucial factor of individual choice. Nor can the process of moving beyond the ethical necessarily be understood as a purely immanent process:

‘A purely immanent natural process excludes the “transcendent” interventions and bestowals familiar even in secular experience, say in moments of falling in love, in awe or insight, in encountering the sublime.’

Kierkegaard proposes a new category that replaces Hegelian mediation and Platonic recollection: this is repetition. But Kierkegaard’s intention is surely not to propose a new perfectly general scheme. Whatever repetition may mean, it must be immanently part of the task of selfhood, and therefore a task for the individual. But nor can repetition be purely immanent to selfhood if any sort of bestowal or transcendence is to be accommodated. Repetition would seem to straddle the line between that which is immanent to selfhood, and that which might be bestowed upon it.

In order to grasp the notion of repetition, it is necessary to consider the reasons for Kierkegaard’s dismissal of Hegelian mediation and Platonic recollection. Individual choice is the pivotal notion in the progression of selfhood as Kierkegaard understands it, and choice, as we have seen, means much more for Kierkegaard than the simplest sense of self-conscious deliberative choice. Being a process which is underpinned by identification and self-understanding, choice is impossible to reconcile with any process of immanent negation such as Hegelian mediation. Stating it simply, choice is positive, and therefore cannot be reconciled with a process of negation. The progression of selfhood is ‘toward a God or Good of open possibilities, not fixed finalities.’

As such, it must also stand in contrast to a process of Platonic recollection, which is the recovery of ‘a timeless past’ ‘accessible to us in memory through Socratic questioning.’ The progression of selfhood can be understood as

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427 Repetition, page 33.
future-oriented to the extent that it is the unfolding of a potential as yet unknown, an unfolding which has its basis in the choice of the self rather than in the negation or the recovery of anything it might be understood to contain.

While repetition is not to be confused with recollection, Kierkegaard (through Constantin) courts paradox by characterising it as ‘recollection forwards:’

‘Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards.’

While it is far from obvious as to how this might be understood, we can begin to grasp the meaning of this apparent oxymoron in terms of the pivotal notion of the either/or. It is on the basis of this existential choice that we can understand the progression of selfhood as future-oriented: not because the self must self-consciously choose itself, but rather that its recognising the either/or is to have already so chosen. We have seen that there is no ‘sitting on the fence between selves’; the self is never in the position of self-consciously choosing the self it will become. Rather, the self chooses in terms of its understanding of itself, thus in terms of a self it has already become. In a sense, the self is always already ahead of itself: it is a certain self-understanding that enables the self to make the morally responsible choice, and a different self-understanding that enables it to make the choice. To choose in terms of a certain self-understanding is to reaffirm the choice of the self which was articulated by the either/or, and it is in this sense that the task of selfhood can be understood as one of recollection forwards: it is the recollection and reaffirmation of a choice that has already been made.

Repetition is a notion which seems, to some extent, to recapitulate notions which have been considered in earlier chapters. Thus, we understand the self as inherently directed towards greater clarity of self-understanding, where it is only against a background of self-understanding that the self can be so directed. In a similar vein, we understand the moral agency to be the expression of a motivational self concept, whereby it is through virtuous action that this is expressed and realised. But

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429 Repetition, pp. 3-4.
430 This notion was explored in Section 3.16.
431 This notion was explored in Section 4.15.
repetition takes the directedness of selfhood a step further, taking it beyond the ethical in a way in which the notions considered in the earlier chapters clearly do not. The notion of choice is crucial to that of repetition, and in a substantial sense, and indeed in a sense far more substantial than the earlier notions of the directedness of selfhood. Moreover, if the notion is to be the means to understand the transition beyond the ethical, then there is much more to be said about repetition. If it does indeed straddle the line between that which is immanent to selfhood and that which might be bestowed upon it, then the self-directedness described by the notion of repetition must be understood in the most substantial sense, that of an absolute *telos* which the individual may discover within himself.

As with the notion of the teleological suspension of the ethical, Constantin explores various possibilities for understanding the notion of repetition; yet again, it is a notion which is open to endless re-interpretation, and to explore all of the various alternatives is beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, by exploring the interconnection between the notions of repetition and the teleological suspension of the ethical, we are able to elaborate many of the apparently paradoxical facets of Kierkegaard’s notion of the choice of the self. The new either/or which articulates the transition from the ethical is the key; implicit in this transition is the question of immanence and transcendence, as well as the absolute *telos* of selfhood as something the individual must discover within himself, and the first-personal significance which would correspond to the absolute *telos*. The new either/or is the means by which we as philosophers might interconnect the notions of repetition and the teleological suspension of the ethical, and it is also the means by which the individual, pre-philosophically, might interrelate matters of first-personal significance with an absolute *telos* he might discover within himself.

The either/or is pivotal to understanding the progression of selfhood beyond the ethical. In the simplest sense, repetition might be interpreted as the need to repeat the choice of the self in the new either/or which articulates this transition. But it is clear that there is much more to be said than this; the notion of the either/or is inherently paradoxical, and this is surely something which Kierkegaard intends. Indeed, the very term ‘either/or’ would seem to invite paradox: *either* the choice is some volition on the part of the self, *or* it is the recollection and reaffirmation of a choice that has
already been made. The new either/or which articulates the move beyond the ethical is either a matter of immanence, or it is a matter of transcendence. That is, either it is a choice for the self, or it is the choice of the self.


Repetition is the means to understand selfhood as an ongoing task. We are told that repetition is itself a task: ‘repetition is a task for freedom.’\(^{432}\) Again, Kierkegaard’s intended meaning is far from obvious. Its being a task for freedom would suggest that repetition is more than an individual undertaking. This would appear to be a good start on interpreting Kierkegaard’s statement, to the extent that this resonates with the paradoxical sense of choice that Kierkegaard intends the either/or to denote. It is in this spirit that we might begin to grasp the meaning of repetition in terms of the either/or transition from the ethical. It is in this transition that the individual is connected with his absolute telos. If freedom is that absolute telos, then it is a task for the individual to find within himself the means to connect with this as something in relation to which he can understand himself.

Caputo takes up the point that repetition is a task, interpreting it as the ongoing task of choosing oneself. Thus, ‘selfhood is slowly forged in the fire of repetition, of choosing, and choosing again and again.’\(^{433}\) However, this says little about the paradoxical nature of the choice itself. If the choice of the self is simply assumed to be a purely individual undertaking which must be repeated, then repetition is tied to a limited sense of choice which fails to invite the paradox that Kierkegaard surely intends. Moreover, repetition is construed as external to the choice in the sense of being after the fact: the assumption seems to be that there is a choice, and it is one that must be repeated. On the contrary, we need to understand repetition as being in some sense internal to the choice which is the either/or; only thus might we be able to grasp Kierkegaard’s characterisation of repetition as recollection forwards. Only thus might we accommodate that which is immanent to selfhood as well as that which might be bestowed upon it.

\(^{433}\) Caputo, 2003: page 178.
Mooney offers a richer interpretation of the notion of repetition. Beginning with Kierkegaard’s intentionally paradoxical definition of repetition as recollection forwards, the forward-looking, future-oriented movement of selfhood is emphasised. For Mooney, this forward orientation is not something which can be understood as a volitional undertaking on the part of the individual; rather, it is a ‘stance of receptivity.'

It is a stance of being open to new possibilities: internal to the choice of the self is the possibility that one might be able to choose (choice,.) in terms of some renewed or hitherto unseen significance, being a first-personal significance and therefore one in which an absolute telos of selfhood might be implicit. To so choose is to choose on the basis of understanding oneself in relation to this absolute telos; it is to understand oneself as able to so choose. It is also to understand the phenomenon in terms of this renewed or hitherto unseen significance. Ultimately, it is to perceive the world as having the potential to be understood in terms of this renewed significance. Self-understanding is inseparable from this renewed worldly significance: ‘Self and world become reciprocally articulate.’

Mooney’s interpretation allows us to understand repetition as internal to the choice of the self. It is the recollection forwards of a self-understanding which is enabled by the choice of the self, a self-understanding which enables the self to choose in terms of this understanding. Indeed, it is only ever able to so choose, to the extent that there obtains a constitutive relation between self and good. But this cannot mean that the self is purely passive, understanding itself as a pure receptivity, inviting the possibility of some transcendent bestowal. Repetition must still be a task, and while it cannot be understood in the purely active sense that Caputo’s interpretation might suggest, nor can it be understood as purely receptive or otherwise passive. For Mooney, the task is one of sustaining receptivity: it is a task of remaining open to understanding both self and world in terms of a renewed significance. This may be a first-personal significance, and the self which is able to choose (choice,.) in terms of this significance need not be one we could understand as either religious or ethical.

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436 Kierkegaard was concerned to establish the necessity of becoming the man of God, and if we wish to generalize the point rather than adhering to a strictly religious reading, then some interpretation on our part is called for.
‘Repetition becomes enablement, allowing life whatever significance it may have, despite our failure to ground that significance in terms of some explicit all-inclusive theory.’\textsuperscript{437}

Repetition is the ongoing task of selfhood: it is the task of remaining open to the new possibilities that are the immanent potential of selfhood. Selfhood is an ongoing task to the extent that it does not, or at least need not, stop with the ethical life. What lies beyond the ethical is for the individual to discover within himself, and it is a stance of receptivity that allows for this to unfold. Such a stance is open to the possibilities both of immanence and transcendence. Rather than repetition \textit{per se} being the task, the ongoing task of selfhood is one of sustaining receptivity. ‘Giving up on repetition as an explicit task is preparation for repetition as world-bestowal.’\textsuperscript{434} World-bestowal is coming to see the world with a renewed significance, possibly a first-personal significance through which the self might discover its absolute \textit{telos}. To perceive the world with a renewed significance might be to perceive it with a significance hitherto unseen or unarticulated or subtle or inchoate; one such might possibly be the subtle or inchoate dimension of the SEE.

\textbf{5.15. The task of articulation reconsidered.}

Our original question addressed the task of articulating those dimensions of the significance of the ecological entity which may be subtle or inchoate. One alternative was that this should be understood as a question \textit{for} the self but not \textit{of} the self, and therefore ultimately a task for the poet. This was contrasted with the richer, more interesting and elusive alternative, that this might indeed be a question \textit{of} the self, and therefore a task not only for the poet but for any self at all in its everyday dealings with the ecological entity. The possibility we have sought to explore is that the SEE might be understood in a sense much richer than the instrumental valuing which corresponds to the ought of prudent self-interest. The latter being a matter of deliberation and rationalisation, we have sought instead to understand the SEE as having a dimension that is irreducible to reasons or rationalisation. It is this irreducible dimension that might be a first-personal significance.

\textsuperscript{437} Mooney, 1998: page 302.
The task of articulation, the task of being ethical, has been explored as a task for the individual. This task is one which we can now understand more broadly, whereby questioning the limits of the ethical is integrally part of that task. To question the limits of the ethical, formerly a task which was the exclusive domain of the philosopher, can now be understood as a task for the individual. We might reconsider the image of von Neurath’s ship: to rebuild the ship while at sea, no longer the exclusive preserve of moral philosophy, is a task for the individual.

Our task of articulation has proven to be more than the task of being ethical: it is to articulate the limits of the ethical. This is a task which we can now recognise as one that is both philosophical and pre-philosophical. It is the task of remaining open to the possibility that both self and world might be understood in terms of a first-personal significance, such that we are able to choose in terms of this significance. It is to be open to the possibilities of the ethical life as Williams describes it, being ‘that worthwhile kind of life which human beings lack unless they feel more than they can say, and grasp more than they can explain.’ No longer to be understood as the exclusive preserve of the poet nor of the moral philosopher, the dual task of being ethical and of questioning the limits of the ethical is a task for the individual. The stance of receptivity of this individual is one of remaining open to the possibility of finding renewed significance in an experience of the transcendent or the sublime. The self that assumes this stance is an ordinary self open to the possibility of extraordinary experience. Its task of articulation is more than a question for the self, and more than a question of the self: accommodating the possibility of both immanence and transcendence, it is a question of more than the self.

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438 Williams, 1981: page 82.
Conclusion: Reconsidering the task of environmental responsibility.

We are today called upon to cultivate greater environmental awareness. To do so is perceived to be a general imperative, thus one which behoves us both individually and collectively to re-examine our relationship with the ecological entity. To do so, however, would seem to require of us something more than acting in accordance with prudent self-interest. A broader sense of responsibility would seem to be implied: our responsibilities, it would seem, are now global. Moreover, it would seem to be assumed that the sense of global responsibility to which we must awaken is necessarily environmental responsibility. Passmore observes that an imperative is perceived in a sense which is unprecedented:

‘Men are now being called upon, entirely without help, to save the future. The future, it is presumed, lies entirely in their hands; tomorrow cannot take thought of itself; it is they, now, who have to save tomorrow, without any help either from Providence or from History. No previous generation has thought of itself as being confronted by so Herculean a task.’

It would appear to be incumbent upon us to transform ourselves in such a way that we would become more environmentally responsible. However, it is far from clear as to what it could mean to do so, or what the task of cultivating environmental responsibility might entail.

If environmental responsibility is to be understood as having its basis in something more substantial or fundamental than prudent self-interest, then it is clear that this must be a basis upon which we are able to understand ourselves. That is, we need to be able to understand environmental responsibility as integrally part of selfhood, such that we are able to situate and orientate ourselves meaningfully in relation to it as something which is an essential part of our being most fully the selves that we are. However, while prudent self-interest is a conception which we can understand to apply generally, thus to any self and to all selves, this does not entail that the basis for genuine environmental responsibility can be conceptualised in an analogous way.

This study has investigated the various possibilities for establishing a basis for environmental responsibility, and by so doing has shown that this basis cannot be reduced to some conceptualisation which would apply generally or universally. Nevertheless, the question remains as to how we might understand ourselves in relation to the notion of environmental responsibility.

Chapter One has shown that a principled basis for our being ethical with respect to the ecological entity cannot be established without begging the question. This rules out what may have seemed the most self-evident means to establish a basis for environmental responsibility. While we may naturally look to our philosophical traditions for the principles that might guide us in understanding the various senses in which we have responsibilities, we could expect to find none that would direct us towards understanding what it might mean to be environmentally responsible in any substantial sense. There are no established principles that will guide us, and it cannot be assumed that we will be able to derive any such principles. Thus, if we are to find some basis for environmental responsibility, then we must look elsewhere.

Chapter One has demonstrated a result that has broader implications than this immediate conclusion. It has shown that our addressing the question of how we might be ethical with respect to the ecological entity can only proceed by addressing fundamental questions about what it is to be ethical, thus of what it could mean for there to be an ethical dimension to our relationship with the ecological entity. It is shown to be an invalid assumption that there can or must be a theoretically grounded ought which is established by philosophy. But the reasons for our inability to establish a principled basis for our being ethical with respect to the ecological entity are not unique to the ecological entity. Rather, the reasons for this inability are to be found by raising very general and indeed fundamental questions about the nature of what it is to be ethical. By shifting the emphasis away from the spurious questions as to how we could or should understand the ecological entity differently, we see that the real questions concern the way in which we understand ourselves as engaging our goods and values. It is on this basis, rather than on the basis of establishing a theoretical grounding for the ought, that we should seek to understand the various senses in which we have responsibilities.
We have seen that only the most rudimentary sense of environmental responsibility can be reduced to a principled basis. This is prudent self-interest; this, however, is a very limited sense of responsibility, whereby only the most rudimentary sense of self-understanding corresponds to the most rudimentary of ways in which we might value the ecological entity. The question this study has raised is whether a richer sense of the ought than the prudential ought might obtain in our relationship with the ecological entity. We have seen that should this possibility obtain, then we must look to the many ways in which we articulate the ordinary ought, rather than seeking to establish any foundational principles, in order to understand how this is so. It is the many ways in which we routinely articulate the ordinary ought which connects us with the many ways in which we have responsibilities. While prudent self-interest is undoubtedly among these, there are far richer senses of responsibility than this, and it is these which we must seek to understand.

Genuinely substantial questions are prompted once we open ourselves to the richer senses in which we have responsibilities. These, as this study has shown, are questions of selfhood. They are questions which, both philosophically as well as pre-philosophically, force us to confront the question of how we understand ourselves. To fully understand the richer senses in which we have responsibilities must ultimately require that we fully understand ourselves, and it follows that these senses of responsibility are those which we might find most difficult to articulate. But this does not mean that we should seek to make this task easier by reducing it in any way: we should not seek in any way to reduce the questions of selfhood with which we are confronted. Rather, our task is to open ourselves to the possibility of richer senses of responsibility by opening ourselves to the question of how we are constituted by the activity of engaging our goods and values.

Chapters Two and Three have shown that if environmental responsibility is to be understood as being among our richer senses of responsibility, then it must be understood in terms of the constitution of the self. As we have seen, the self can be understood as constituted by the activity of engaging its goods and values. However, we have seen that it is a mistake to assume that the self must be constituted in some particular way in order for environmental responsibility to be possible: to make this assumption is to reiterate the error of seeking to establish the ecological self. As
Chapter Four has shown, we cannot understand selfhood as constituted by the activity of engaging some particular good, much less one that is external to the self or is foreordained. That is, we cannot separate environmental responsibility from our overall task of selfhood, and then seek to establish it on its own particular basis. If environmental responsibility is to be possible in a substantial sense, then it must emerge as an integral facet of selfhood as the self unfolds into its fullest potential.

Chapter Five has explored the question of how we might understand environmental responsibility to be integrally part of the overall task of selfhood without its being tethered to any notion of an external ecological good. If such a sense of responsibility is to emerge, then it must do so as an integral part of the immanent potential of selfhood as it unfolds. Following Kierkegaard’s account of selfhood, we have seen that this consists in a progression ‘toward a God or Good of open possibilities, not fixed finalities.’ It is clearly not a progression towards realising the intrinsic value of the ecological entity or any other foreordained good. The essential Kierkegaardian point is that the culmination of the immanent potential of selfhood is to connect ourselves with the God or good in terms of which we understand ourselves. Therefore, both immanence and transcendence must be understood as integral to the self’s progression through the ethical life. It is a progression which straddles the line between that which is immanent to selfhood and that which might be bestowed upon it. Again, Kierkegaard courts paradox: integral to the task of selfhood is that which lies outside the self.

Anscombe and MacIntyre have argued that our established system of morality has become disconnected from the context within which it was meaningful. Such a context was one in which we were able to understand ourselves in relation to a God or good that was meaningful to us. It is clear that we need not accept Anscombe’s claim that concepts of moral obligation and duty are meaningful only with reference to some conception of divine command. Nevertheless, her key point stands that selfhood must be understood in some essential relation with the good, where the latter is a good in terms of which we can understand ourselves. This study has shown that the latter need not be a conception of virtue. Moreover, it cannot be any conception of the good which is foreordained. This is the point which motivates Kierkegaard’s project: while it is clear that we need not understand ourselves in relation to a God or
good which is foreordained, the essential point we take from Kierkegaard is that we cannot do so. It is a task for us as individuals to bring ourselves into a meaningful relation with the God or good in terms of which we are able to understand ourselves, where our so doing is a purely private undertaking.

Anscombe introduces the fundamental point that we derive our morality from our understanding of ourselves. MacIntyre elaborates this point by offering some degree of historical explanation as to how this has been so, and more importantly, how this aspect of our morality has been forgotten. Taylor elaborates this key point still further by explaining the relationship between the self and the goods in terms of which it understands itself as a constitutive relation, thus constitutive of selfhood. For Anscombe, MacIntyre and Taylor, our ability to be moral derives from our understanding of ourselves. Kierkegaard concurs that there must be this essential interrelationship between the self and the good, however it is a fundamental point which he radicalises. For Kierkegaard, our being moral is not something which derives from our understanding of ourselves in the sense that the latter is something we might conceptualise. Thus, our being moral is not something which we can derive, for example, from our understanding ourselves as made in God’s image, or as just one accident of evolution among countless many. Rather, our being moral is an immanent potential which we must discover for ourselves, within ourselves.

Should there be an inherent connection between our being moral and our being environmentally responsible, then this is something which we must discover for ourselves, within ourselves. Should we succeed in so doing, then our task of discovering this aspect of our moral agency would be one of redefining the limits of the moral sphere to include the ecological entity. However, this does not mean that the ecological entity is a special case, or that there is anything peculiar to the ecological entity which enables or demands our articulating the limits of the moral sphere: for Kierkegaard, our articulating the limits of the ethical is integrally part of our realising an immanent potential to be ethical. It is, as such, a task for the individual. That is, the task of redefining the limits of the moral sphere should not be assumed to be the exclusive preserve of the philosopher. Rather, it must be understood to be integrally part of our task of being and becoming the selves that we are. Should environmental responsibility amount to more than a matter of prudent
self-interest, then it must be understood to be part of this task. That is, it must be understood to be intrinsically part of selfhood.

Environmental philosophy has raised the question of whether our moral agency can or must extend to the non-sentient non-human. Thus, the possibility it has examined is that of an expanding sphere of moral concern. But we have seen that an expanding sphere has broader implications; moreover, this study has shown that these broader implications have not adequately been addressed by the contemporary literature. Among these implications are questions about how selfhood should be conceived. While alternative conceptions of selfhood have been considered by contemporary eco-philosophy, this study has also shown that the fundamental questions concerning selfhood have not been given adequate consideration. The genuinely fundamental questions raise issues that are intrinsic to the self, thereby addressing the question of what it is to be a self. As such, they are prior to any question of what sort of self we should be or become. Prior to the assertion that we should be or become any particular sort of self is the recognition that our task is in fact one of more fully understanding the selves that we are.

The examination of Kierkegaard’s dialectic of selfhood undertaken in this study is appropriately considered to be a preliminary examination, perhaps only a brief sketch. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to demonstrate that if environmental responsibility is to be understood in a sense which is more substantial than the trivial sense of prudent self-interest, then this must be intrinsically part of selfhood. Our brief examination of Kierkegaard’s dialectic of selfhood has demonstrated one way in which we can accommodate the possibility that environmental responsibility is intrinsically part of selfhood. However, there is surely much more to be said about how well Kierkegaard’s account of selfhood is able to accommodate this possibility, and how it compares with alternative accounts of selfhood, particularly those accounts which have followed the trail which Kierkegaard has blazed.\textsuperscript{440} In any case, it is clear that a consideration of the notion of environmental responsibility must begin by considering this to be an immanent potential of selfhood, yet to be realised, yet to be articulated.

\textsuperscript{440} Heidegger’s account of the self is one such. Poole (1998) notes that Kierkegaard’s influence upon Heidegger is far greater than Heidegger acknowledges.
To allow the possibility that there are immanent potentials of selfhood as yet unknown is necessarily to allow that selfhood must be understood in some richer sense than the simple senses which this study has found to be untenable. Among the latter are the subject which relates to things as mere objects, the Sartrean self, the Pelagian self, and the ecological self in its various guises. All of these fail to accommodate the richer sense of the self in which recognition of its historicity and the inevitable limitations this entails are merely the first step in realising the fullest potential of selfhood. None of these accounts adequately accounts for the self in such a way that it can be open to the possibility not only of immanence, but also of transcendence. While it is clear that we need not be beholden to an Augustinian conception of the self, we can now see that to fully embrace the immanent potential of selfhood is to allow the possibility of some sense of the transcendent as integrally part of this immanent potential. What this may mean is for the individual to discover. The point we as philosophers can take from this is that the immanent potential of the self to find within itself the God or good in terms of which it understands itself is a possibility which cannot be dismissed. Indeed, it would seem to be a possibility which the tradition has all but forgotten.

Should we allow the possibility that environmental responsibility is among the immanent potentials of selfhood, then we must allow for the possibility that our most fully realising our potential to be environmentally responsible is not something we can bring about simply by deciding that it should be so. Rather, our task is to most fully understand ourselves, and to find therein our potential to be environmentally responsible, as well as the inherent limitations that might preclude it. Rather than something foreordained or something which should be universally applicable, our potential to be environmentally responsible can only be something we can articulate in our own terms, perhaps by finding the ecological entity to be significant in a way that includes an irreducible component of first-personal significance. But there is more than mere Romantic individualism here: as Chapter Five has shown, significance is a notion which is bound up with that of identification, such that our fully coming to understand the significance of the ecological entity is a task that must

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441 The philosophical tradition in its broadest sense: ‘Continental’ and Anglo-American.
engage the most fundamental goods with which we identify, and in terms of which we are able to understand ourselves.

This study opened with the observation that Hugo and Leopold had each independently come to the conclusion that our ethical systems were incomplete. Acknowledging that they were not working within a philosophical framework, our initial question was whether the questions they raised were genuine ones, thus questions which we might investigate philosophically. However, it is now clear that the fact that they were not working within a philosophical framework need not derogate from their ideas. Writing as individuals who perceived the need for a reconsideration of how we might interrelate more fully with the ecological entity, they can be understood to have perceived the need to articulate the limits of the ethical. They can therefore be understood to have perceived the need to undertake a task which we now recognise as a task not for the philosopher, but for the individual.

Leopold’s maxim is perhaps the most frequently cited quotation in the field of environmental ethics. However, Leopold’s essay The Land Ethic closes with an observation which has been wholly overlooked or ignored by the eco-philosophical literature. Thus, anticipating a major point which Chapter One of this study has examined, Leopold observes that ‘nothing so important as an ethic is ever ‘written’.’ Anticipating Passmore’s point that a morality is never something which ‘one can simply conjure up,’ Leopold perceived the land ethic as something which would in due course emerge as attitudes and practices evolved. The definition of a conservationist, he claims, ‘is written not with a pen, but with an axe.’ Emerging from within our attitudes and practices, the land ethic as Leopold imagined it might be one facet of environmental responsibility. Our task as individuals is to remain open to the possibility that the latter might emerge from a clearer understanding of ourselves.

442 ‘A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.’ Leopold, 1968: pp. 224-5.
444 Passmore, 1974: page 111.
Bibliography


