THESIS

FLOURISHING AS AN ECOLOGICAL SELF:

WHY OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH NONHUMAN NATURE MATTER

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ABSTRACT

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Writers in environmental ethics are often concerned, and reasonably so, with articulating what it is about beings in nonhuman nature that hold value. In doing so, however, whether our human relationships to nonhuman nature are valuable is a question that is often overlooked. This project aims to address that question and argues that our relationships to nonhuman nature are crucial to our flourishing, and because of this, they ought to be central in our discussion of value in the nonhuman natural world. I take particular kinds of relations to constitute relationships and advance three particular relations–care, reciprocity and respect–as relations that together constitute ideal human relationships with the more than human world. Given a clear picture of what a good relationship with the nonhuman natural world looks like, we can begin repairing our relationship to nature for the betterment of ourselves and the rest of the natural world.

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INTRODUCTION

It is clear that humans are capable of having relationships with non-human beings. It is less clear what kinds of relationships we ought to build with the more than human world, and how we ought to build them. The literature in environmental ethics has often been caught up with whether natural entities (whether individuals or collectives) have intrinsic or extrinsic value and what ethical implications this might have. What I explore in what follows is whether there might be value in our relationships themselves. Rather than locating the source of value in any particular being, I hope to show that particular kinds of relationships have value themselves. I will argue, this value does not come from either side of the relation alone but from the particular kind of connection between the relata.

I outline three particular kinds of relations as examples of the kinds of relations that make up valuable relationships. The three relations I explore are relations of care, respect and reciprocity. In outlining these relations I hope to build on a largely feminist framework that takes a pluralistic, contextualistic and affect-responsive approach to ethics. In some ways, my discussion of these relations reconceptualizes them from mere attitudes held by a subject into relations between beings–as a strand among many that connect beings creating a complex of relations that I take to be a relationship. In doing so, we can create a clearer picture of what valuable relationships might look like which may help guide our practice of cultivating these kinds of relations.

The idea of the value of these kinds of relations is grounded in an ecological view of the self that views our relations to the more than human world as constitutive of our humanity and

therefore our flourishing. Our ecological relations are fundamental to what it means to be human and because of this, having good relationships with the nonhuman natural world will be vital for our flourishing. Once we understand humans as ecological beings, a relational account of eudaimonia that takes our relationships as parts of our flourishing naturally follows. This relational eudaimonism grounds the value of our relations and properly motivates the reasons to cultivate these relations.

The aim of chapter one will be to explore the landscape of environmental ethics, particularly concerning the question of what kinds of things are generally considered as valuable or not in environmental ethics. I will discuss a number of different approaches that those in environmental ethics have taken to account for the value of the nonhuman natural world. Many have tried to explain and justify the value of the nonhuman natural world in terms of intrinsic value, instrumental value or constitutive value, among other value concepts. One thing these approaches fail to do is address the question of what kind of value our relationships to nonhuman nature might have in themselves. In focussing on the justification of the value of subjects in nonhuman nature, our relationships to nonhuman nature get overlooked. I hope to conclude the chapter with the idea that a focus on our relations and relationships with the nonhuman natural world has the potential to express a wider range of our human experience. Many take their relationships to nonhuman beings to be significant sources of value and a relational focus aims to adequately express those experiences. This is done through a value framework that acknowledges that the subjects in and of themselves are not the only factors in expressing our value situation.

Once we have decided to focus on relationships, the next question becomes what it is about good relationships that differentiates them from bad ones. In chapter two I draw from examples of interpersonal and extrapersonal (human to nonhuman) relationships to make the case that care, reciprocity and respect are necessary components of ideal relationships. I take care, reciprocity and respect to be particular relations that together constitute the relationships that we value and ought to pursue. I explain my conception of each of these relations and how they fit together to cultivate good relationships. My notion of care is informed by the rich feminist care ethics literature that takes care to have necessary affective and responsive components that are context-specific. I expand a traditional conception of care that often only explicitly considers humans, to ecological caring as those writing in the ecofeminist literature have done. I then taper the broad conception of "reciprocity" down to mean mutually beneficial exchange rather than an exchange that can be beneficial, harmful or indifferent. Traditional indigenous conceptions of reciprocity influence much of my conception of reciprocal relations in this project as is made apparent in chapter two. Finally, I define respect largely through the framework of Stephen Darwall's two conceptions of respect. Respect can consist in appropriate consideration for someone based on a particular feature they possess or a positive appraisal of one's qualities or skills. While I describe two kinds of respect, I hold that these kinds are two instantiations of the same relation, a relation constituted by an acknowledgment of value in the object of respect. The point of chapter two is to explain what these relations are and to point out that we can have caring, reciprocal and respectful relations with the nonhuman natural world. Not only can we have these relations but successfully cultivating all three of these constitutes an ideal relationship with nonhuman nature.

Given that chapter two gives us a picture of what a good relationship would look like, we then have to say something about what makes a good relationship good. In other words, why should anyone care to cultivate good relationships with the nonhuman natural world in particular? In Chapter 3 I aim to answer this question by showing that our good relationships with the nonhuman natural world directly contribute to our flourishing. I do this by arguing first that our ecological relations make up part of who we are as humans. Following Aristotle, I propose that in order to understand what human flourishing consists in we must first understand what human life consists in. In establishing that our ecological relations make up part of who we are as humans, it then follows that these relations will play a constitutive role in our flourishing. If our ecological relationships play such a central role in our flourishing then this would ground the motivation to cultivate the best relationships possible with the nonhuman natural world.

By the end of this project I will have motivated an alternative approach to a focus on relationships rather than particular entities as the objects of value. Given such an approach, I will have also outlined what kinds of relations would make up the kinds of valuable relationships we ought to pursue. The value of these relationships will have been grounded in a relational eudaimonia that takes the self to be partly constituted by ecological relations. The main takeaway being that there is value in cultivating good relationships with the nonhuman natural world. This value is not only realized through human flourishing but also through the flourishing of our entire social and ecological network.

Chapter 1: Is There Another Kind of Value?

In this chapter I hope to briefly survey the landscape of environmental ethics with regards to the different kinds of value in these discussions and how we tend to assign value. We find that value is often assigned to individual objects and often described in ways that oversimplify common experiences of value. Turning from an emphasis on objects to an emphasis on the value of relations provides a promising path that opens up the landscape and language through which we can describe value experiences and prescribe ethical ways of living in, from and with nature.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value

In environmental ethics, there is often discussion of whether nonhuman living things have intrinsic value. As there has been a notorious ambiguity about what intrinsic value actually is in the environmental ethics literature, I hope to get clear on "intrinsic value", and related terms, before moving forward in this project. Generally, if something has intrinsic value, then it is something that merits value "for its own sake" or "in its own right." One example of something with intrinsic value might be happiness. If someone were to ask why happiness is good I might give some reasons why, but one thing I would not say is that happiness is good because of its relation to some other valuable thing. In other words, things with intrinsic value can be described as having non-derivative value. The value of happiness is not derived from anything external to the thing itself. Anything holding value that is derived from something external to it can be said to have extrinsic value. If I could point to something other than happiness to explain why happiness is good then the value of happiness would not be intrinsic, it would be extrinsic. I will discuss extrinsic value in more detail

later in this section but first it will be helpful to discuss different conceptions of intrinsic value to clarify the particular role of intrinsic value in this project.

Katie McShane identifies four general ways in which thinkers have conceptualized intrinsic value (McShane, 2007). The first characterizes intrinsic value as concerning claims about the role that something with intrinsic value should play in moral decision making. This position involves views that take it that those things with intrinsic value deserve moral standing or moral consideration. The second characterizes intrinsic value as concerning claims about the way that it makes sense to care about something with intrinsic value. This position involves thinking of intrinsic value as how we ought to value those things with intrinsic value. Valuing something "for its own sake" would fit this conception of intrinsic value. The third characterizes intrinsic value as concerning claims about which properties of something make it valuable. Generally this position views things with intrinsic value as being valuable in virtue of their intrinsic properties. The fourth characterizes intrinsic value as concerning claims about the metaphysical status of a thing's value properties. One way to hash this out is to say that value itself is an intrinsic property of a thing. Intrinsic value in this sense means that things with intrinsic value have value regardless of any actual or potential valuers. I lay out these senses of intrinsic value to show the variation in the literature but also to clearly differentiate the way in which I will use "intrinsic value" from others. These different senses are not necessarily mutually exclusive as one might lead to another given a comprehensive theory but one particular view is generally at the center of what we mean when we use the term "intrinsic value." I take the second sense described above to capture most accurately what is meant by intrinsic value in the Western contemporary environmental ethics discourse as

well as general discourse about intrinsic value. Something with intrinsic value is something that ought to be valued for its own sake.

If intrinsic value means that a thing ought to be valued for its own sake, then something with extrinsic value is something that ought to be valued for the sake of something else. More specifically, something with extrinsic value has such value because it stands in a particular relation to something else that has value. Extrinsic value is derivative in the sense that the value something has, it gets from relating to something else in a particular way–its value is derived from something else. As an example, we can think of the internet as having extrinsic value. The internet allows us to access information in a way that was never possible before which has led to a revolutionary accessibility to knowledge. If you think that knowledge is one of the many things that has value, then the internet has value insofar as it is a means of acquiring knowledge. This value is extrinsic because it is derived from the value of that which it produces or facilitates, namely, knowledge.

In the example of the internet, the thing with extrinsic value stands in a means-end relation to another thing with value. The internet is a means of acquiring knowledge. This kind of extrinsic value relation is commonly referred to as "instrumental value." Instrumental value is also the most commonly discussed form of extrinsic value; however, there are a number of other ways that something can have extrinsic value that is not instrumental. Think about a statue that symbolizes an important historical figure or movement like a statue of Martin Luther King Jr. The value of that statue is derivative in that it gets its value from the person it represents (MLK) and is extrinsic in this way. It is not instrumental, however, as the statue has no impact on the realization, production, facilitation, etc. of the thing with intrinsic value to which it stands in relation to. The

statue is in no way a means to MLK or civil rights in general, and yet it still derives its value from MLK and all that he represents.

Intrinsic Value, Instrumental Value and Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics is rife with discussion of extrinsic and intrinsic value, specifically what kinds of things have intrinsic or instrumental value. One major move in the history of environmental ethics was to say that nature, or some aspects of nature do in fact have intrinsic value. Meanwhile in environmental ethics, often, whatever was not ascribed intrinsic value was ascribed instrumental value if it were to have any value at all.[1] These two value concepts have often been taken to be jointly exhaustive, excluding any other value descriptions. So while mammals like deer, horses, or dogs are generally ascribed intrinsic value, other living things like grass, trees, or bugs might only be thought of as having instrumental value. A very simple example is that while trees may not be the kinds of things that deserve to be valued for their own sake, they do take part in producing the conditions necessary for sustaining life, namely providing oxygen for humans to breathe. Human life being valuable, trees are a means to that end and therefore have instrumental value. So, value can be intrinsic or instrumental, but as demonstrated earlier there are other relations that classify different kinds of extrinsic value. If we follow the weight of the environmental ethics literature, in which the emphasis is almost exclusively on intrinsic and instrumental value, it may be that these are the only two that reasonably apply in the sphere of environmental ethics. However, I find this unlikely, and will dedicate the rest of the chapter to

[1] Hugh LaFollette and Ronald Sandler, "The Value of Nature," essay, in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 5th ed. (Blackwell Pub., 2020), 263–70. Sandler sets up his argument with the question of whether nature only has value because it serves us in some way or because it is something worth valuing for its own sake, implying the jointly exhaustive dichotomy of intrinsic and instrumental value.

exploring other ways we might be able to talk about value in environmental ethics. Having given this general overview of intrinsic, extrinsic and instrumental value, I now turn my attention to ways in which non-instrumental extrinsic value in particular has been applied in environmental ethics. Particularly, I hope to analyze how extrinsic value has been used to fill in the picture of value in environmental ethics, providing a more complete characterization of what I have referred to above as our "value situation", and show that the traditional framework overlooks particular sources of value. Sense of place is one of these alternatives that acknowledges that particular connections to places hold particular significance for many people.

Sense of Place

We often develop connections to our environment that become significant parts of our identity. This connection to place is often referred to as a "sense of place" (Norton and Hanon, 1997). In many cases, the place we grew up establishes part of our identity as a person. Our sense of place often constitutes what we call our "home." If that environment were to change drastically, we would lose that particular sense of place. While we may be able to develop a new relationship with the new environment, part of what is lost is tied to that previous relationship. It may be that we establish a new sense of place, but any new sense of place will differ in significant ways from the previous one, even if there is no overall loss in net value once this new sense of place is established. To make this point clear, imagine the loss of a beloved spouse. In this scenario, the widow goes on to find love once more and creates a connection just as strong and valuable as her previous one. In this case there is no loss in net value in the long run, but something is lost; a new relationship cannot replace the particular past connection to another person.

The same can be said for connections to natural areas as well. Suppose I was living near Mt. Shasta and walked by it everyday on my way to work for years. I noticed the Giant Sequoias as I walked by and I learned when the best time to see particular birds was. My experience of this area allowed me to create a kind of relationship with it. Even if Mt. Shasta could be replaced (in the sense that we can put something else where Mt. Shasta once was), the relationship *to Mt. Shasta* cannot be. Relations are relations to particulars and while we might make new ones, the particular relations we lose are lost forever.

What I hope to show with this example is that in speaking in terms of the value of objects being lost, replaced, etc., we overlook important aspects of the value of our relations. If we do not acknowledge the particularity of our connections, it is likely that the value of objects will seem to be all that there is to discuss. Sense of place is a connection to a *particular* place, and this particular connection cannot be replaced by a connection to something new. Bryan Norton emphasizes that there is value lost in the "loss of a special relationship between people and place" (Norton, 2002: 352). Our experiences and practices in a particular place cannot be adequately exchanged or substituted because of this personal and place-specific nature. My experience living near Mt. Shasta would connect me closely to that particular place and this particular connection cannot be replaced, which is why something (my particular connection) would be lost if Mt. Shasta was replaced.

Norton adds that a sense of place includes a sense of space as well as a sense of history. Sense of space refers to how a particular place relates to everything outside of that place. A sense of history refers to an understanding of both the cultural and natural history of a place (Norton,

2002: 159). When we have a fully developed sense of place, this often comes with an understanding of how our "home" interacts and relates to the surrounding and global environment as well as an understanding of how it came to be and those who related to it before me (and perhaps those who will come after me). This sense of space and history adds to our connection with the place and its particularity. This connection makes the lack of proper substitutability apparent as it is predicated on particular connections.

O'Neill et al. make a similar point when, in speaking of an ancient meadowland, they say that "no reproduction will do since that particular is valued not as one possible realization of some set of valued properties, but as a particular object constituted by a particular lineage and location" (O'Neill, 2008: 146). O'Neill et al. are making the case that a place's history provides value that we undermine when we simply try to substitute it for something else that provides the same benefits. This seems to be more about a place's history giving the place a unique value but we can also think about this in terms of the value of a place's unique historical connections. It is not the benefits or particular valued properties that the place brings about that makes us want to protect it, but the fact that it has a particular and unique history. Understanding a place's history is part of what it means to have a sense of place. A place's unique history situates it among a larger web of connections of which we are a part. For O'Neill and Norton, the history of place adds to the meaning that place has for us.

We often share a history with particular places as we consider places "home" for many years. During that time, we become shaped by the environment as we too watch the environment go through periods of change. You might develop a relationship with the rabbit that frequents your

yard or happen to witness baby birds learn how to fly in your backyard. You may look up and appreciate the same tree every morning as you eat breakfast on the porch and enjoy the priceless experience of planting a garden with your children every year. Norton points out that instrumentalizing a place does not account for these personal and place-specific values developed by the people in these places. So if we were to measure the value of the garden we plant with our children every year in terms of the vegetables yielded or even the joy that planting the garden brings, we would be overlooking a significant aspect of value. Namely, that our experience with a place establishes a sense of place that becomes part of our identity rather than a mere source of valuable outputs. The experiences people have of a place cannot be fully replaced or substituted. The general idea is that a sense of place adds value that is not captured by simply measuring the value of objects without regard to their deeper connections to humans, not strictly accounted for by instrumental value. Whether the place has intrinsic or extrinsic value is one question, but this question often overshadows another important question about the nuances regarding how we actually value places. Place seems to make up part of our history and identity and is valuable for that reason.

Norton's view about sense of place is a pragmatic one, constructed primarily for the purpose of guiding policy decisions to account for things people value about nature. In this way Norton is focussed on valuing and valuers more than value itself. In other words, Norton seems to be saying that people value places in a variety of ways and for a number of reasons that are not purely monetary or instrumental, and not that there is some other kind of value in nature that we are not recognizing. This may allow for a more pragmatically useful characterization of why and

how places matter to people but does not say much about the value of the place itself–apart from the value it gets from being actively valued by somebody. Norton is not attempting to argue that we ought to value places in certain ways or that our relations themselves have value, he only intends to reveal the complexity by which places are actually valued and what that might mean for policy. The important takeaway that can be extracted for the purposes of this project is that sense of place brings attention to the idea that when discussing value, looking closer at particular connections and the implications of those is significant and often overlooked.

Constitutive Value

Simon James goes further than Norton in trying to classify what kind of value something like "sense of place" might refer to. James claims that "people value natural entities on account of the meanings they embody" (James, 2019: 3). It is the meanings these things have for us that give them value. Similar to Norton, it is the meaning or value "for me" that is of concern here. Notice that this still centers around valuers and things valued. James goes on to explain that the kind of value that characterizes these meaningful relations is best described as constitutive value. Constitutive value refers to a part-whole relationship in which the part is valuable because it helps constitute a valuable whole. Notice that this is different from instrumental value as instrumental value is characterized by a means-end relation. While not instrumental, constitutive value is extrinsic as the value of the part is derived from the value of the whole. James argues that nature may constitute part of something valuable like my identity or sense of self which would mean that nature has constitutive value. James is able to demonstrate how this might work in practice with a number of examples, one of which involves the Saami people of Northern Scandinavia (James,

2019). The Saami people see herding reindeer as a deep and meaningful part of their culture and as a result, the reindeer makeup part of their sense of self. In this way, the reindeer constitute part of what it is to be a part of the Saami people. So, the reindeer are taken to be part of a meaningful whole and therefore have constitutive value. In the same way, if a natural area constituted part of my sense of self, it could be said to have constitutive value.

Another way to illustrate constitutive value is to think about the case of a painting. A painting might have a certain value but if we were to cut out a square inch of that painting it would no longer be the same painting. That square inch piece of canvas is part of the meaningful whole of the painting and the painting cannot exist without it. In the same way, the Saami people's sense of self would not be what it is without the reindeer. Notice that while Norton was focussed on pointing out what and how things are valued, James's main concern is why these things are valued and how we might categorize this kind of value.

One thing the painting example might make clear is that the piece of canvas that we cut out is of little value on its own; it is primarily valuable as part of the whole painting. We might be inclined to think that the reindeer have value beyond the constitutive value realized by their part-whole relation to something like a sense of self. While this may be the case, it seems that James's aim is to point out another kind of value that characterizes cases of things that have value in virtue of partly constituting human identity. Whether these things have value outside of their value as being a part of a valuable whole is still an open question. In this way there might be a disanalogy with the painting example but it still serves as a good demonstration of constitutive value.

It is still the case that constitutive value as construed by James centers around nature's contribution to humans. The difference is that instead of nature standing in a means-end relation to human value, nature stands in a part-whole relation to human value. The meaningful whole for James is personal or group identity, sense of self, or other anthropocentric concepts that are taken to hold value. However, if something–like reindeer in the case of the Saami–constituted part of what it *is* to be Saami then there is a less clear divide between human and nature, much like the patch of canvas and the painting.

Constitutive value might characterize the kind of value that Norton is referring to when speaking about sense of place but, like instrumental value, the value is described exclusively in terms of the objects involved. Norton and James identify objects valued and attempt to explain why they are valuable. Again, the focus is on things which are actually valued by valuers. While this may help to inform policy decisions it does not tell us enough about how we ought to act or develop ethical relationships with nature. Value to someone does not tell us how we ought to value. It only tells us how to identify and interact with places that are valued. What Norton and James are doing gives us insight into how things are actually valued, which allows us to acknowledge these things in order to properly weigh their importance in making decisions. While this is helpful, there may be other ways to capture and explain not only how and what we value, but how we ought to value with respect to the more than human world.

Relational Value

Another way that place-based value might be understood is as relational value. While constitutive and instrumental value are characterized by relations, the value is often discussed in

terms of either side of the relation, namely, the relata. Rather than the value being attributed to any side of the relation, relational value as proposed by Muraca, Chan and others refers to the value of the relation itself (Himes and Muraca, 2018; Chan et al. 2016). As humans, we stand in a number of different relations and different kinds of relations every day. The significance of these relations is going to depend on the context of the relationship as well as the specifics of the relata themselves among other things. If I am standing beside a tree I might be in a "beside" relation to the tree but this is not usually significant. However, if I planted this tree in my backyard with my father as a child and grew up with the tree as a significant part of my experience, I might now have a significant relation with it. The complex of relations that we have with another constitute our relationship with that other. For example, friendships are made up of relations like love, respect, and reciprocity. These kinds of relations are valuable for a number of different reasons and so there is value that exists in my relationship with a friend. There is value in the relation itself that is not located in myself or the other person. It is the relation between myself and the other that we recognize as having value.

Relational value has been characterized as a third category of value beyond the classic intrinsic-instrumental dichotomy. Himes and Muraca propose this kind of value when they say that "relational values are relevant to broad groups of people and are held distinct from both instrumental and intrinsic value" (Himes and Muraca, 2018: 3). Chan et al. support this kind of relational value as well when they say that "relational values are not present in the thing but derivative of relationships and responsibilities to them" (Chan et al., 2016: 1462). Chan et al. emphasize that people often make ethical choices based on these relationships as opposed to

inherent worth or preference satisfaction. The idea is not to throw away intrinsic and instrumental value as useful categories but to add a third category that fills in gaps in the traditional value landscape.

Norton and Sandbeg agree that relationality is a useful value category but contend that "relational values should not be thought of as a third type alongside the other two, but rather that relationality is a shared aspect of *all* environmental values" (Norton and Sandbeg, 2021: 700). These authors point out that all environmental values manifest in particular contexts in which there is a valuer standing in a particular relation to something else. Values arise when people face choices in particular situations. Norton and Sandbeg emphasize the relevance of particular connections to humans in particular places at particular times. For Norton and Sandbeg, it seems obvious that value comes from the act of *valuing,* something which requires a valuer and a thing valued. This being the case, values will always come from relations in the sense that the valuer and things valued cannot be unrelated. Thinking back to the sense of place discussion, this valued-valuer connection is apparent in how Norton describes sense of place in terms of someone standing in a particular relation to a place that has come to mean something to them.

While Himes and Muraca (2018) acknowledge that all values are relational in nature, they point out a difference between the origin of value and the content of value. Himes and Muraca agree that values originate from relations but add that particular value categories can then be parsed out based on the kinds of relations. In this sense, the relation comes first, and from that arises particular value. For Norton and Sandbeg however, in valuing we create a value relation. This circumvents the need to categorize values as intrinsic, instrumental or relational. These value

categories do not help to "better understand choices faced in particular situations" (Norton and Sandbeg, 2021: 708). The starting point is the act of valuing rather than particular kinds of value. If our value categories do not help communities weigh their values when making important environmental decisions then there is no good reason to propose them as categories. The emphasis here is clearly on whether our categories are making a difference in decision-making given a particular context. The valuing in real-life situations comes first for Norton, that valuing then determines how we describe the value rather than theorizing about how values might arise and slicing those up into distinct categories.

So, we can characterize all value as relational the way that Norton and Sandbeg do or we can view relational value as a third value category supplementing intrinsic and instrumental value. Alternatively, we can think of relational value not as a way to think about *kinds* of value, but as a shift of focus to *what* has value–namely relations rather than objects. The rest of the chapter will be dedicated to evaluating these options as possible paths to opening up the discussion of value in environmental ethics in ways that capture the wide range of value that can exist in the more than human world and ways that lead to actionable prescriptions for ethical interaction between humans and nonhuman nature.

One problem with Norton and Sandbeg's value-as-relational view is that it takes a descriptive focus when it comes to matters of valuing. For this view, categorizing value is going to rely on the practical implications of how these values play out in specific contexts. Their position starts with and revolves around the situational context; rather than creating a framework that guides how we should value, they merely aim to describe how values play out in specific situations.

What the value-as-relational view overlooks is the fact that these theorized categories provide frameworks that allow us to visualize how we value *and* the kinds of value that we *ought* to be pursuing and actualizing. As Muraca points out, "if we neglect axiology we lack adequate ground for pleading in favor of a general attitude of respect or appreciation towards beings other than moral community members'' (Muraca, 2011: 381). While Norton and Sandbeg's approach may be useful in helping decide what we ought to do in certain situations, it tells us little about how we ought to value. The purpose of these value theories is not only to guide our actions but also guide our attitudes.

Given that value categories are useful, philosophically and pragmatically, some argue however that there is no need for this additional third category of relational value. Patrik Baard (2019) argues that relational value is accommodated by the traditional intrinsic/instrumental model. Baard claims that instrumental values easily account for subjective relations in that subjective preference for one thing over another can be accounted for in terms of instrumental value. Baard uses the example of preferring one knife over another even though neither knife is better than the other for cutting things (maybe we prefer it because it looks nicer). He claims this can be accounted for in terms of instrumental value in that while using the knife we prefer, we gain more subjective satisfaction. The knife we prefer increases our satisfaction thereby adding to its instrumental value. By accounting for these subjective preferences in terms of instrumental value, there is no need to reference any other category of value, including relational value.

The problem with Baard's analysis is that relational value cannot always simply be characterized in terms of subjective preference. It is not simply that I prefer my garden to my

neighbor's garden because mine is more aesthetically pleasing to me, but it is that I recognize and value the relationship itself that I have with my garden because this relationship merits value. While this relation may be satisfying to me as an instrumental means to my satisfaction, that is not the only value that arises from it nor is it the reason for cultivating such a relation. This characterization of relational value as subjective preference is also misguided because relational value does not only apply to individual people but can apply to groups as well. Subjective preference refers to the preferences of any one individual, but in many cases relational value is a matter of cultural values or group identity which cannot be a simple matter of subjective preference. Going back to James' example of the Saami, describing the relationship between the Saami and the reindeer in terms of subjective preference does not capture the true nature of that relationship.

Baard also begs the question. He says, "this [the instrumentality of our relations] makes the value *extrinsic,* which the above framework can accommodate" (Baard, 2019: 196). Baard implies that that which is not intrinsic (and therefore extrinsic) can be accounted for by instrumental value. In doing so he is assuming the intrinsic/instrumental dichotomy and pigeon-holing all extrinsic value into that instrumental category. What Baard fails to recognize is that not all extrinsic values are instrumental. Even if relational value is an extrinsic variety of value this does not mean it can be wholly accommodated by instrumental value. I made this point clear earlier in this chapter when I mentioned kinds of extrinsic value that are not instrumental, including James' characterization of constitutive value and the case of the MLK statue. As noted earlier, instrumental value is a form of extrinsic value characterized by a means-end relation. Baard attempts to find a means-end relation

where there is not one. To characterize relational value as a means of satisfying subjective preferences is to misunderstand what relational value is.

Not only does instrumentalizing relational value misrepresent it, it also imposes a dominant value framework that neglects alternative ways of relating to nature that have been historically silenced. Himes and Muraca point out that "articulating the value of Pacific salmon in terms of only instrumental value silences the specific languages through which Indigenous People express their deep and multifaceted relationship with salmon and their relational web" (Himes and Muraca, 2018: 5) Consider a scenario where instead of catching salmon on their seasonal salmon run, salmon was pre packaged and shipped to the Indigenous people of the Pacific. The loss of the salmon run could be made up for in terms of diet, but the previous relationship between the people and the salmon will have been lost. This value cannot be fully captured in terms of instrumental value. Himes and Muraca also add that "forcing these languages of valuation into an instrumental framework leaves them ill-defined and neglects the complexity and specificity of relations articulated by the people in their own terms" (Himes and Muraca, 2018: 2). The value of salmon to Indigenous peoples of the Pacific cannot be properly understood in terms of benefits or preference satisfaction. It is not simply that the salmon is nutritious or that catching salmon makes these people feel satisfied, rather it is a deep and complex relationship with salmon that holds value. Further, instrumental value "implies a one-directional flow of benefits" that overlooks the ways in which human to non-human nature relations might be reciprocal. Norton and Sandbeg fall prey to this criticism as well, though in a much different way. While these human to non-human nature relations will be part of the value context, it is only the flow of benefits to humans that the relation

provides that will be taken into account. So while a reciprocal relation with non-human nature may be part of the equation, what matters is how that reciprocal relation affects the people in their particular situation. On such a view, the flow of value will always loop back around to, and be grounded in, humans.

One important idea that relational value theories bring to light is that value does not necessarily need to be located in any particular subject. One motivation for Baard and others to oppose these theories is the need to locate value in subjects. For Baard, it cannot be the case that the relations themselves are valuable, rather the object with which I am in relation bears value because I prefer it. One thing I hope to have made clear in this discussion is that instrumental value does not properly capture the value present in these kinds of relationships. Whether relational value is a new and distinct value category the way Himes, Muraca and others propose, I will not argue in this project. However, relational value theorists do bring out an important emphasis on the value of relations that is worth more attention. It seems clear that relations *do* themselves have value distinct from the value held by the subjects in relation, and a focus on relations brings new advantages to environmental ethics discussions.

As seen in some of the cases just described (value of a knife, garden, or salmon run) basic value categories like instrumental value can be difficult to apply simply to objects in many cases but also, and more importantly, in focussing on the value of objects we overlook other important aspects of our situation, particularly our relationships. Our relationships to objects are often complex and unique–to describe the value of these objects in terms of something as simple as human preference satisfaction overlooks this complexity. In focussing attention on relationships we

foreground particularity in a way that makes it easier to attend to a wider range of value experiences.

In shifting our focus from objects to relations we do not need to categorize objects as having this or that kind of value and can instead start from the particularity of the relationship and determine what makes that particular relationship valuable or not. This allows for more nuance in our value prescriptions as we shift away from starting with categorizations of universal kinds of objects and instead start from particular relations. This foregrounding of particularity also allows us to emphasize the quality of value (the particular way that value is being instantiated), instead of only measuring quantities of value, by evaluating particular value scenarios in a way that looks beyond the value of the objects involved. We can refer back to the Mt Shasta case above to emphasize the point. A replacement of Mt Shasta with something that will end up netting a comparable value in the long run, will still strip me of a *particular* valuable relation that is not captured when thinking purely in terms of the value of objects.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed Norton and Sandbeg's 'value-as-relational' view as well as the relational value perspective of Chan, Muraca and others. While the 'value-as-relational' view does use the language of relations to describe value, this view does not allow us to speak about value concepts outside of specific situations. The relational value approach of Chan and others has the advantage of having some explanatory power to adequately express a wide range of experiences and articulate proper modes of interacting with the non-human world. What we want is an environmental ethic that tells us not just what is being done, but also what ought to be done. What

the relational value approach as well as other concepts discussed here, like sense of place, show is that there is significant value overlooked when we focus only on objects and not on particular connections to them. I will argue throughout this project that shifting our attention to the value of relationships allows us to aptly describe many of our value situations but also prescribe the kinds of relations we ought to be cultivating with the more than human world. One prescription that we would expect from a relational value view is the kinds of relations we ought to cultivate in order to have good relationships. The next chapter is dedicated to the exploration of just a few of the kinds of relations that a relational value view would advocate for. One thing to remember is that this view shifts the focus from objects to relationships– a point that I hope will be made more clear in discussing the kinds of relations that I take to be valuable and central to a theory of relational value.

Chapter 2: Care, Reciprocity and Respect

Relationships are made up of varying complexes of relations which are characterized by particular forms of interaction between different beings. When thinking about what kinds of relations are valuable, care, respect and reciprocity seem central once we consider the role they play in constituting relationships that significantly contribute to our flourishing. Care, respect and reciprocity are the relations that I will be focussing on in this chapter. These three do not entirely constitute the set of all valuable relations, but I take these three together to be necessary in terms of constituting an ideal relationship with nonhuman nature. Many other valuable relations will be related to these in some way as they often overlap to some degree.

First I will consider care and show how care is conceptualized on this relational framework. This will involve a brief exploration of feminist care ethics and ecofeminism to understand how care is being conceptualized and how that might influence and align with the framework at hand. Once we understand care in this relational sense, one that emphasizes the particularities about the relationship itself, it will be made apparent how this applies to extra-human relationships. From care, informative examples of reciprocity are presented that will guide a discussion of reciprocity that follows the template set by the treatment of care. In short, I will show what reciprocity is and how it applies to our extra-human relationships. Finally, I will carry out a similar treatment of respect that describes the ways respect for nonhuman nature might manifest in practice. One thing that will be made clear throughout discussion of each of these relations is that each of these relations make up part of what makes a relationship good and that all three are necessary for the

best possible relationship. By the end of the chapter I hope to have shown how these particular relations are realized on the relational value framework which can help guide our ways of relating to nonhuman nature going forward.

Caring and Care Ethics

All of us have been cared for to some degree and many, if not all of us, have also cared for somebody else. After all, we are not born with the capacities to care for ourselves and we often have people in our lives that receive our care whether it be family, friends or significant others. Care is a fundamental part of our lives and because of this we all have some idea of what it means to care for someone; being cared for teaches us how to care. We all have some common sense notion about what care is and at this point I hope to make explicit what care is. On one conception of care, care is characterized in terms of an attitude toward another object. On this relational view however, care is an aspect of the relationship itself and not exclusively of either of those involved in the relationship. Care is a complex relation involving affect, action and responsiveness. If my brother were to fall ill I would have some kind of emotional reaction that would include empathizing with his situation, thinking about ways I could help, and then acting in such ways. There would also be some kind of observable response from my brother upon receiving the care. How affect, action and responsiveness are defined in terms of genuine care relations will be discussed throughout the coming sections. The point for now is that my caring relation with my brother cannot be adequately explained by reference to features about him or myself. Instead it is better captured by reference to the connection between us. I care as I do because of our long and close relationship. The flip side of this conception of caring relations is that relationships that I have that are not as

strong may involve lesser degrees of care. The point is that care is not best articulated as simply an object-oriented attitude, but a relation that makes up particular kinds of relationships. At this point it will be useful to look to feminist care ethics in order to inform our idea of what a genuine care relation could look like.

It is important to emphasize that caring actions are not merely beneficial actions. For example, a care-taker that feeds you, washes your sheets and gives you your medication is not necessarily "caring" for you in the sense most true to the feminist conception of care on which the present conception of care is based. Caring will necessarily involve some affective dimension that plays a role in constituting a genuine care relation. In addressing this point in relation to caring for plants, care ethicist Nel Noddings writes, "the engrossment of caring leads me to learn more about the plants in my care and to try harder to meet their needs. I am not convinced that a mere caretaker will do the right things at the right time" (Noddings, 1984: 150). The affective attachment to the cared-for leads to the carer to go beyond what a mere caretaker would do. Noddings suggests that a genuine one-caring would be more sensitive to the needs of the cared-for and be more motivated to enact the care than a mere caretaker. Of course we would prefer a care-taker that is actually caring as opposed to one that is simply acting out of mere duty, devoid of any emotional motivation. It is important, however, to distinguish merely beneficial acts from genuine acts of care.

In many ways, feminist care ethics rises in response to a conceptual framework which has been practiced at the expense of women. One major aspect of this framework emphasizes the importance of reason (traditionally seen as a male trait) while downplaying or subordinating the

role of emotion (traditionally seen as female trait) in deliberation. However, as ecofeminist Marti Kheel aptly states, “we cannot even begin to talk about the issue of ethics unless we can admit that we care (or feel something)” (Kheel, 1985: 144). Trying to do ethics from a framework that subordinates the fact that we care denies an enormous part of our humanness, and one major goal of care ethics is to bring that aspect of our experience into the conversation. Frameworks delimit our conceptual vocabulary and perception which then narrows the range of possible approaches. If we can recognize what makes frameworks inadequate we can then shift our framework to accommodate a wider range of ideas. In acknowledging that we care, we can begin to acknowledge a wider range of morally relevant aspects of our lives, like our relationships and the emotions often present in them.

The oppositional, dualistic framing of reason and emotion is one of the prime motivations for an ethics of care. Reason-emotion and other “value-dualisms” involve dualistic framings where the dualistic pairs are seen as oppositional. One additional example of this would be sentient vs. non-sentient. In putting these dualisms in opposition, we are put into a position where it seems we have to choose one side or the other. In the case of the reason-emotion dualism, the traditional framework has privileged reason over emotion. From a feminist perspective, logic and reason do have their proper place but so does empathy and care. Instead of thinking of reason and emotion as oppositional perhaps we can begin to consider these two aspects of our thinking as complementary in deliberation and problem solving. In sports, we do not teach young athletes that offense is better, or more valuable than defense. These two aspects of the game are not oppositional but complementary, and together make a great athlete or team.

In reworking the structure of our conceptual framework by challenging these oppositional dualisms, feminist care ethics makes space for historically overlooked and underappreciated values like care, empathy, and friendship. The feminist conceptual framework is much more inclusive and allows us to recognize a wider range of values. One important connection that has been made in the feminist literature is that this framework that has been historically used to subordinate women has also been used in the same way to dominate and subordinate nonhuman nature. The traditional value framework in philosophy is plagued by these epistemic transgressions that narrow the scope of acceptable ideas and concepts which has resulted, in many ways, in the oppression of identity groups as well as overlooking the value of the nonhuman world. Due to this connection between oppression of women and the environment, feminist care ethics can and has been used to inform a new environmental ethic built on a more inclusive conceptual framework. There is not a single, static feminist conceptual framework yet there are common throughlines across feminist ethics that characterize this family of views. I will outline a few of the characteristics of feminist ethics that Karen Warren (1990) notes as main tenets in feminist thought. I discuss these particular elements of Warren's outline because they are especially relevant for the current project and serve to ground and support the environmental ethic of relational value that I propose in this project.

Firstly, feminist ethics are contextualist which means that there is an emphasis on voices of particular, lived human experiences. Rather than relying on a theory that proceeds by applying universal rights and rules to every context, the context is taken into account in making ethical choices. We must ask questions like, "Who is involved?", "What is the history of the place or people involved?", "What are the predictable outcomes and who will be affected by them?" Asking these

questions allows us to put ethical problems into contexts that better inform our ability to make responsible ethical decisions. Feminist ethics are also pluralistic which comes from the belief that there is not a singular voice but a plurality of them that represent a wide range of identities. This ensures that a wide range of values and perspectives are considered and assessed. Finally, feminist ethics reconceive what it means to be human. Karen Warren writes, "Humans are properly understood essentially (and not merely accidentally) in terms of networks or webs of historical and concrete relationships" (Warren, 1990: 141). Feminist ethics acknowledges that being in relationships is part of what it is to be human. Recognition of our relationality, contextualism and pluralism do not exhaust the list of the defining characteristics of feminist ethics and may be expressed in markedly different ways across different accounts of feminist ethics. However, these features of feminist care ethics are some of the key concepts I find particularly relevant for developing a more relational environmental ethic.

Given these features we can start to see how feminist ethics might inform an environmental ethic that is centered around the value of relations. These connections will show up both explicitly and implicitly throughout the continued explanation of this theory of the value of relations. One connection worth noting quickly is the connection between contextualism and the view of humans as relational. Taking a relational view of humans it would follow that our relations themselves have value as being part of who we are, and in this way those relations ground a theory that takes relations to have primary ethical value. Further, contextualism is necessitated by a theory of relational value: relationships are all unique and the relations that make up these relationships can only be fully understood within the context in which they exist. This view of humans as relational

will be the focus of the next chapter. Given this grounding, we can return to the discussion of care as a relation within this relational value framework.

Caring Relations

Commonly, care and empathy are grouped together due to the fact that care will often involve empathy in some way. Empathy is a large part of the affective dimension of care and is associated with care as a result. Michael Slote cites psychological literature that shows how "empathy plays a crucial enabling role in the development of genuinely altruistic concern or caring for others" (Slote, 2007: 13). Slote argues that merely caring is not enough and that a more specific kind of caring–empathic caring–is a better starting point for moral evaluation. Similarly, Nel Noddings, one of the first to develop an ethics of care, holds that caring necessarily involves an affective dimension that she calls 'engrossment.' Engrossment results in one being emotionally vulnerable to the thoughts and feelings of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984). Not only has much of the literature in care ethics supported the idea that care necessarily has an affective dimension, it also seems intuitive that genuine caring involves some kind of emotional motivation.

Whether this affective dimension necessarily has to be something like empathy is less clear. For example, I can care for my garden but I would not say that I am empathizing with my garden. Traditional care ethicists might cite this as a reason why care for plants may not be an instance of genuine care. However, it does seem that I can care for my plants in a way that involves some kind of emotional attachment. While I may not be vulnerable to the "thoughts and feelings" of my plants in the way Noddings had in mind, I may be emotionally vulnerable to the well-being of my plants. My emotions might be tied up to some degree to whether or not my plants do well. While it

may be a step away from most traditional care ethicists, it seems reasonable to say that genuine care relations will involve, at least, an emotional vulnerability to the well-being of the cared for. This will include empathy and engrossment but also other kinds of emotional attachments that do not make necessary reference to the thoughts or feelings of the other.

Caring always involves something that is cared-for and as such is necessarily a two-part predicate. We care *for* another*;* we cannot simply care without being in some kind of relation. Care in this relational sense is not simply defined by any distinct features of those involved in the relationship. Care is part of the relationship itself which arises from the particular connection of the members involved rather than from any distinct feature of any particular member. While distinct features of an individual, like a particular attitude toward the cared-for, are part of what make the relation of care possible, care is more adequately understood as the relation rather than the attitude itself. Remember that genuine caring will involve the complex *connection* between subjects (which will involve affect and responsiveness in addition to attitude), so referring only to one's attitude provides at best an incomplete description. Karen Warren uses an example of a rock climber noting that "it is the climber's relationship with the rock she climbs which takes on special significance" (Warren, 1990: 135). There may be certain features of the rock or the rock climber that are conducive to the production of the caring relation but the relation itself can only be captured through an understanding of the connection between the two. So, in looking at a particular care relation, pointing out any particular aspects of one relata will not entirely explain the care relation.

The fact that caring is conceived as a relation rather than a mere attitude has much to do with the responsiveness dimension that I previously mentioned as necessary for genuine care. The cared-for must have a perceivable response to the care received. This adds another aspect of care that might limit the kinds of things that could be involved in a genuine care relation. Nel Noddings asks, "Might I have an actual relation with the desert? This is not an easy question. It was not easy to answer questions concerning my relation to cats, and I may wonder about my relation (or its possibility) to the ferns, and orchids, and gesneriads I grow" (Noddings, 1984: 150). Noddings' conception of care necessarily involves that the cared-for are receptive to the care in a perceivable and meaningful way. This is because in perceiving the care making a difference for the cared-for, feedback is provided as to how our care is being received which allows us to adjust in appropriate ways if our care is not being welcomed or received well. This perceived responsiveness also adds to our emotional motivation as perceiving the care being well-received connects the two parties more deeply in a way that facilitates future care in beneficial ways. While Noddings does mention caring for plants, she denies that things like plants can be involved in relations of genuine care as they do not provide the reciprocity she deems necessary for proper care.

However, things like plants and even oceans, rivers and hillsides do show a responsiveness to our care and can therefore be involved in genuine instances of care. When we care for a plant appropriately, the plant responds in a perceivable way. It might perk up after drooping from lack of water or nutrients. It also might start to grow more vibrantly indicating that the care has had an impact on its flourishing. The same is true for ecological entities in which living things reside like rivers or forests. Proper care for a river may result in the flourishing of that ecosystem. If we take

these as signs of responsiveness then it is reasonable to claim that these things can be involved in genuine care relations, even on traditional accounts of care. Of course, what kinds of things we take to be responsive will depend on what we mean by "responsiveness." But the only point I intend to make here is that there are reasonable ways of construing "responsiveness" that would apply to a wider range of beings than Noddings had in mind.

The larger point is that we are beings that care, and that genuine caring relations are good. This goodness is grounded in the flourishing that this relation facilitates, an idea that I will make clearer in the next chapter. When caring about the Sierra Nevada mountains, I do not first determine whether they merit my caring before I do. It would also seem strange to feel the need to justify my caring to myself or anyone else. I will certainly have reasons why I care but these will not be the same reasons for everyone considering the caring will be a product of a particular relationship. A particular connection that also involves some emotional motivation–adding to its particularity. I would *feel badly* if all of the trees in the Sierra Nevadas were uprooted tomorrow. That special and unique relationship I had with those trees produced an emotional connection leading to a care relation that is now lost if those trees are destroyed. A relational view does not require that we justify why it is that *kind* of thing that we happen to be in relation with (whether it be a person kind of thing, mammal kind of thing or a mountain kind of thing). If we have a grasp on what kinds of relations are good ones, then we have reason to cultivate those which gives us another means to articulate what it is about the features of the nonhuman world we find valuable.

Care is a complex relation that, in practice, will be intricately tied up with others. Plenty of examples that demonstrate caring relations also demonstrate reciprocal ones. As demonstrated

earlier, care necessarily involves some kind of responsiveness. This responsiveness gives care a kind of reciprocal dimension that connects it closely to a particular conception of reciprocity that I will discuss next. To summarize caring relations, remember that care is a complex made up of beneficial action, affective attitudes, and responsiveness. These affective attitudes are directed towards the cared for and are not limited to empathy or engrossment. The affective attitudes must only create attachment to the cared for in a way that makes the one caring vulnerable to wellbeing of the cared for. Responsiveness refers to the perceivable reception of the cared for. Acknowledging that nonhuman nature exhibits a kind of perceivable responsiveness allows for nonhuman nature to be engaged in genuine care relations.

Although reciprocal care is not necessary for a care relation, relations of care are often reciprocal. Reciprocal relations are constituted by mutually beneficial giving and receiving. For many indigenous traditions, this is a mutually beneficial exchange that recognizes the interdependence foundational to the identities of the giver and receiver. For many of these traditions, practicing care also means practicing reciprocity. One of the many ways to do this involves taking and giving flesh to nourish yourself and eventually the rest of nature after death. Underlying this emphasis on reciprocity in indigenous traditions is the understanding that we are intimately connected with the rest of nature. This web of connections foreshadows the value in cultivating reciprocal relations throughout our network.

Indigenous Traditions and Reciprocal Relations

Kyle Whyte and Chris Cuomo have explicitly noted the connections between indigenous land ethics and feminist care ethics (Whyte and Cuomo, 2016). Some common themes found in

both traditions include an awareness of one's interdependence in a web of intimate and multidimensional connections that include both humans and non-humans, recognition of the value of relationships, and the importance of an emotional closeness in our relationships (Whyte and Cuomo, 2016). While care ethics and indigenous ethics overlap in many ways, indigenous communities have been intentionally practicing these kinds of relations for centuries and provide many great examples and guidance on how to enact these relations–especially reciprocity.

We can find worthwhile insights for the treatment of reciprocity from the writings of indigenous writer and scientist Robin Kimmerer. In recounting the mythic creation story shared by the first peoples of the Great Lakes, Kimmerer writes, "From the beginning of time, we are told that the very first encounter between humans and other beings of the earth was marked by care and responsibility, borne on the strong wings of geese... in the beginning of the world, the other species were our life raft. Now, in the spirit of reciprocity, we must be theirs" (Kimmerer, 2014: 19). For many indigenous traditions, reciprocity can be traced back to our origin stories. In this story, the creatures of the world, previously made up of only water, created land in order for "Skywoman" to have somewhere to reside. On this view, ecological beings constructed a world capable of sustaining us and we have a responsibility to return this gift in the spirit of care and reciprocity.

Origin stories are more than mythical stories about how our world came to be. They convey rich information about our relationships to the more than human world. They also provide guidance toward what these relationships ought to look like. One big takeaway is that it is the earth and all of its creatures provide us "gifts that we have neither earned nor paid for: air to breathe, nurturing rain, black soil, berries and honeybees, the tree that became this page, a bag of rice, and

the exuberance of a field of goldenrod and asters at full bloom" (Kimmerer, 2014: 20). These stories contextualize the background conditions for the relations that we find ourselves in with the more than human world. They put into narrative the foundational interdependence that we have with that world. It is the kind of relationship we ought to nourish and continue developing. Whether origin stories like these mean anything to us culturally or not, the fact that we quite literally owe our lives to the nonhuman natural world is clear with or without reference to origin stories like these.

We are given much and in giving back we can acknowledge and appreciate the gifts we have been given. It is undeniable that reciprocal giving and receiving is foundational for nurturing a relationship appropriately. Imagine having a friend that never did anything for you–at some point you might start to wonder whether they are really much of a friend. Not all good relationships are necessarily reciprocal, but reciprocity is generally a mark of a good relationship. If I am giving time and energy to a relationship in which I receive nothing, this relationship will likely not last long and it will likely be one that is antithetical to my flourishing as long as it lasts.

With regard to the idea of flourishing, indigenous writer and activist Winona LaDuke cites two essential tenets for the good life, *Minobimaatisiiwin:* cyclical thinking and reciprocal relations (LaDuke, 1994). Cyclical thinking refers to the understanding that all of creation flows in cycles of which life and death are a part. There is also a sense that everything we do will have downstream effects as we are a part of the greater cycle. In describing reciprocal relations, LaDuke also makes reference to the understanding that all of nature is a gift–one we ought to show appreciation and

gratitude for. This viewpoint identifies the cultivation of reciprocal relations as part of what it means to live a good life.

In terms of how we might actually cultivate reciprocity with nonhuman nature, Kimmerer recommends showing gratitude as a primary means of practicing reciprocity. Giving thanks requires that we acknowledge the things we normally take for granted. When eating the food on my plate I can be grateful for the earth and all of its creatures that make it possible for me to be eating in the first place. This requires that I acknowledge the processes that go into producing my food, both ecological and in terms of the human labor involved. Kimmerer notes that while gratitude may seem like a small gift, it has real and powerful outcomes: "practicing gratitude can lead to the practice of self-restraint, of taking only what you need" (Kimmerer, 2014: 20). Taking only what you need can also be seen as a significant practice in the spirit of reciprocity as taking more than necessary can undermine reciprocal relations. This would be similar to taking advantage of the giving nature of a friend–taking more than necessary disrupts the balanced nature of proper reciprocity.

In practicing gratitude, we are led to appreciate the continuous gifts we receive which also involves deliberately paying attention. Kimmerer notes that paying attention is also an ongoing act of reciprocity: "attention becomes intention, which coalesces itself to action" (Kimmerer, 2014: 20). When we pay attention to the world, we are better able, but also more willing to be active in it in ways that promote our mutual flourishing. This is also reminiscent of the idea in care ethics about being cognizant of the ways in which the cared-for respond to your actions. In paying attention to how the cared-for respond we are better able and more willing to act in ways that

promote flourishing. In this way paying attention could be an act of care as well as one of reciprocity, depending on the context.

Gratitude and attention are powerful acts of reciprocity in their own right, but they are also significant because they lead to further reciprocal attitudes and actions. Gratitude and attention lay the foundation for us to even begin reciprocating what is given to us by the natural world. This reciprocity is made manifest in indigenous traditions in a number of ways including language use, ceremony and an overarching land ethic based on reverence and respect for the more than human world (Kimmerer, 2017; LaDuke, 1995; McGregor, 2009). Kimmerer provides a number of ways to cultivate reciprocity that are not exclusive to those that share the same worldviews or origin stories articulated by writers like Laduke and Kimmerer. One thing that these origin stories convey that is widely applicable is the interdependence of humans and the nonhuman natural world. This interdependence provides the setting for relations of mutually beneficial exchange in that when I give back to the more than human world our interdependence is such that this will indirectly benefit me as well. As emphasized by Kimmerer, gratitude is a great place to start as a kind of gateway into cultivating strong and meaningful reciprocal relations with nonhuman nature.

Beyond Indigenous Conceptions of Reciprocity

As we can see with these examples from indigenous traditions, the idea of reciprocity often has a rich cultural background that gives reciprocity central importance in indigenous land ethics. For the purposes of this project reciprocal relations can be defined by a relation of mutually beneficial exchange within an interdependent context. For indigenous traditions, things like respect, interdependence and particular conceptions of the good life are intertwined with

conceptions of reciprocity. I take a less rich conception of reciprocity characterized as mutually beneficial exchange between interdependent parties as my starting point but aim to build out a rich conception of valuable relationships of which reciprocity plays a key role, in conjunction with the other relations discussed in this chapter.

Understanding reciprocity in this way can accommodate thinking of reciprocity in a simple transactional or contractual sense as well as the rich cultural sense described by many indigenous traditions. A transactional sense of reciprocity is expressed through an economic form of exchange or a balancing of scales. I give *because* I want or expect something in return. Imagine two lawyers working at different law firms. One lawyer does a favor for the other with the expectation that the other lawyer now owes her a favor that she can call in some time in the future. The lawyer returning the favor demonstrates reciprocity through a mutually beneficial exchange.

Reciprocity in this sense has been discussed in the context of reward and punishment as a motivator for social cooperation (Guala, 2012; Fehr et al., 2002). If our world is reciprocal, in this sense, then only those who contribute are rewarded. The value of reciprocity is spoken of in terms of its outcomes for those engaged in the relation. Framing reciprocity in terms of outcomes seems to be serving the purpose of justifying why we would ever give a gift–because if we do not give, we will never receive. Contractual reciprocity is more fit to describe my relationship with the vendor at the farmers market than the kind of reciprocity I might share with my brother. As articulated by the indigenous traditions discussed earlier, the recognition of my fundamental interdependence provides the context and basis for my reciprocal relations with all of creation. The context of a farmers market is going to provide a different context for my reciprocal relations with the vendors.

In the farmers market context there is still a level of interdependence between me and the vendor, yet this interdependence is not as significant to my flourishing as the relationships I have with my friends or my surrounding ecological environment. There will be different levels of interdependence across contexts but the key point is that reciprocal relations will be grounded in some level of interdependence.

All of the relations just described are reciprocal because they are characterized by some kind of mutually beneficial relation grounded in interdependence between the relata. Kimmerer talks about reciprocity in terms of returning the gifts given to us by the earth, but even without indigenous origin stories, we can still come to an understanding of how to move about the world in a way that is mutually beneficial for humans and nonhuman nature. Understanding reciprocity as mutually beneficial exchange, reciprocity alone will not be enough to constitute a valuable relationship. We can imagine a case of an employer-employee relationship that is partly constituted by a reciprocal relation (labor in exchange for wages) and yet is still a bad relationship. The employer might be abusive or simply indifferent to the needs of her employee. The relationship could be constituted by a number of bad relations in addition to that of reciprocity. In this way, this reciprocal relation is only contributing to the employees flourishing in an indirect way by providing her wages that she uses to get by. The relationship as a whole is not contributing value in any direct way. This leads me to the discussion of the next relation I take to partly constitute good relationships, respect.

Respect

Respect is generally taken to be a thoughtful consideration and regard for another person and their wishes, needs and desires. In an interpersonal context this generally involves an understanding of how we ought to behave towards other persons. Social norms often bypass the need for any explicit understanding between people as we all have an idea about how to treat people on account of them being people like us. I know that I ought not talk over someone speaking, not because they told me not to but because this is part of the norm of respectful behavior. While social norms give us guidelines for respectful behavior, what is considered "respectful" and "disrespectful" is often modulated by the particular relationship. The closer I get to someone personally, the more I learn about them and the more things I might come to respect about them.

The general form of respect that all people deserve is what Stephen Darwall calls "recognition respect" while the more particular kind of respect he calls "appraisal respect" (Darwall, 1977). Recognition respect is defined as appropriate regard or consideration based on some feature of the one being respected. In using the word 'feature', I take Darwall to mean some inherent feature of the thing rather than an accidental feature like a good jaw-line. One familiar example of this kind of feature is that of personhood. We recognize personhood in other people and realize that this quality suggests that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to behave in the presence of others. Appraisal respect on the other hand, consists in a positive appraisal of one's qualities, skills, etc. In contrast to recognition respect, appraisal respect does not generally imply that we behave in any particular or "appropriate way" in response. The respect consists in the appraisal itself. I may respect someone's philosophical writing skills but this does not imply that I

will behave any differently around them. Recognition respect on the other hand, does not have to be "earned" in the same way as it is owed merely as a result of a thing possessing a particular feature.

As we saw with Darwall, the kind of respect that is owed to all people is recognition respect. The traditional view is that we owe this respect in virtue of recognition of personhood, or some other morally relevant quality. While personhood has many different descriptions, criteria, and explanations, it is generally described in terms of the capacity for rational autonomy in some sense or another. It is clear how this follows from the traditional framework that emphasizes rationality as well as individuality. When rationality is placed in a dominant position in the hierarchy, it makes sense that rational capacities would be grounds for respect. This sense of respect excludes all beings who cannot be considered 'persons' under one of the many criteria for persons that has been posited by philosophers as possible subjects of respect. It is one thing to have considerations that are overridden by others, like the fact that I need to kill this plant in order to sustain myself. It is another thing to disregard something as not worthy of the consideration that a respectful relation entails. To assume that personhood ought to be defined by rational agency or autonomy is to make the central and primary moral quality a paradigmatically human one. Centering ethics around rational faculties is problematic for many of the reasons mentioned in the care section of this chapter but also because this appeal to rational personhood centers our moral discussion around humans which indirectly excludes all of the other beings we share existence with.

Some philosophers have argued that respect ought to extend beyond personhood. Paul Taylor in particular has argued in favor of a life-centered theory of respect. This view argues that we ought to respect all beings, human and nonhuman, on account of them being alive and having their

own welfare or well-being (Taylor, 1981). Put in terms of recognition respect, Taylor is arguing that the feature of having one's own well-being ought to be recognized and respected. Theories like Taylor's aim to vindicate the idea that it is not only humans that are deserving of respect. To assume that rational personhood is the only criteria for respect is arbitrary in a transparently speciesist way and should not be our default starting point.

While Taylor does not rely on rational agency as the sole criterion for those worthy of respect, Taylor's position still relies on identifying a general feature of individuals as grounds for respect. This view is centered around acknowledging a general *kind* of thing (the kind of thing that has well-being). In making respect about consideration for a kind of thing, Taylor overlooks particular features of beings that we might also respect. So I might respect my dog because he is the kind of thing with well-being but I might also respect my dog for the particular loving temperament that he has. Maybe he is always waiting at the door for me when I get home or he seems to give me extra attention when I am obviously feeling down. The advantage of a theory that starts with particular relations is that we can recognize particular features of individuals that we respect in addition to respecting individuals because of the general kind they belong to. Taylor's view is without a doubt an improvement on the personhood view of respect, but is still too narrow with regard to what and how we can respect. A particularist view is able to acknowledge the wide range of ways we can respect nonhuman nature. Recognizing general features like having a well-being is one way to respect nature but there are a number of others, examples of which are given below, that a theory like Taylor's is not able to acknowledge, at least not explicitly or directly.

Taylor's approach relies on a form of recognition respect but, as implied by the example of me respecting my dog, respecting nonhuman beings is not limited to recognition respect. Remember that Darwall also identifies appraisal respect as a form of respect in which I appraise a feature of something as one that I take to be worthy of respect. I might admire the way that plants grow or the way they share nutrients with each other through underground mycelial networks. I might appreciate the beauty in the sound of birds in my neighborhood chirping in the morning. I can also appreciate the niche that a particular species fills within a particular ecosystem. I can respect the kind of self-regulation that ecosystems seem to exhibit. I can identify any number of features that living things or even collectives have and attach these appraisals to them in a way that constitutes me respecting them. Many of the particular features of particular others that we acknowledge and respect will be instances of appraisal respect. Whether recognition or appraisal respect, respect will involve an acknowledgement of the other as having some features that we find valuable.

What I hope to have made clear here is that there are a number of ways that respectful relations with the nonhuman world can manifest. Paul Taylor provides one example of how we might extend respect beyond something like personhood. I have no problem endorsing this view but would also like to endorse pluralism regarding the number of valuable ways in which respect for nonhuman nature can manifest. Having a wide array of ways to cultivate respect gives us more opportunity to enrich these respect relations with nonhuman nature. I can recognize qualities that merit respect like welfare and I can admire particular features of particular individuals.

As with care as well as reciprocity, respect alone will not constitute a good relationship. Imagine, for example, respecting someone who you have no connection with. Let's say you have immense respect for Greta Thunberg as the kind of being with rational agency or well-being as well as her intelligence, passionate activism, etc. The respect itself can be seen as a good thing, but the relationship between you and Greta Thunberg is not one that will play a significant role in your flourishing if the only relation there is respect. A relationship that is made up of respect but without care and reciprocity is not ideal as it is not the kind that will constitute a significant part of flourishing. Respect gets you recognition of the other as having qualities worthy of my regard and consideration, but it does not get you the connectedness that good relationships require.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described three kinds of relations that a theory of relational value would advocate we cultivate with the more than human world–care, reciprocity and respect. Relations of care fit well in a relational value framework and care ethics provides a new context by which to approach this value framework that recognizes the value of taking particularities as our starting points. Reciprocal relations situate us in a world of beneficial giving and receiving which leads us to think more about how we might contribute to our antecedent relationship with the nonhuman world. Respect relations involve us recognizing and appreciating aspects of the nonhuman world that deserve our attention and consideration. Any particular one of these relations will not be enough on its own to constitute a good relationship with nonhuman nature but having one will make it more likely that we cultivate the others. Putting these three relations together, we get closer to what an ideal relationship with the more than human world looks like.

If the goal of environmental ethics is to fix our relationship with the more than human world, then it seems that focusing on our relations would be the best place to start. What I have shown in this chapter is the kinds of relations we can cultivate in order to establish good relationships with the more than human world. In the next chapter I hope to show why doing so is valuable and worthwhile. For this treatment of relations with the more than human world to be compelling, or to even make sense, we need to understand why cultivating these relations with nature is a good thing–why should we? In setting up a relational account of flourishing, I aim to create a context that makes sense of why these relations are valuable. In the same way that indigenous origin stories create a context that implies our inherent relations and the responsibilities that come with it, a relational account of eudaimonia sets up the background conditions that contextualizes these relations within a broader ethical framework.

Chapter 3: Flourishing and the Ecological Self

If we are to take relations as valuable, the next question is about the kind of value these relations hold and the broader ethical framework that grounds this value. As I argued in chapter 1, instrumentalizing our relations oversimplifies our experience and does not capture the complexities of our relations–the value of our relations cannot be merely instrumental. I believe that relationships merit value for their own sake, but more needs to be said about how and why this is. We cannot fully understand the value of relations without understanding how this value fits within a broader ethical framework. If we take human flourishing to be our primary ethical goal, and flourishing is fundamentally relational, then we can give a more comprehensive explanation about why these relations are valuable. Grounding the value of our relations within a eudaimonistic framework will be the goal of this chapter.

I hope to establish a concept of flourishing that is essentially relational, from which the account of the value of relations I have put forth thus far follows. If we conceive of humans as partly constituted by their relationships, then what it means to flourish as a human will make necessary reference to human relationships as well. What it means to flourish will look different on different eudaimonistic accounts that do not take humans to be fundamentally relational. Throughout this chapter, I will make the case for taking humans as fundamentally relational beings–and more specifically as ecological beings. This is the claim that our particular ecological relations are significant constituents of who we are which leads to the idea that these relations are of particular ethical significance. I will make reference to indigenous cultures that have taken a

relational view of flourishing to be central as examples of ways this kind of view has manifested in practice. To help make sense of the idea of humans as fundamentally ecological beings, I will then cite psychological research which supports the idea that cultivating good relationships with the more than human world plays an integral role in our flourishing. By the end of this chapter I hope to have made the case for taking an ecological eudaimonistic approach as a responsible and comprehensive environmental ethic. With this eudaimonistic framework in place, it will become clear how the value of relations to our ecological environment can be appropriately conceived.

Eudaimonia

'Eudaimonia' is a Greek term often translated as 'happiness' or 'flourishing'. Expressed more comprehensively, eudaimonia is taken to mean the state of living the best possible life. For eudaimonistic traditions, ethics is about how we can achieve this state of eudaimonia. Given that eudaimonistic theories are focussed on how to live the best possible life, these theories will often start by looking at what a human life generally consists in, which makes this approach well-suited to give proper attention to our particular relationships. This makes more sense once it is established that human life is constituted in part by a network of relations which makes flourishing a goal that can only be understood as achievable within a network of relations. In other words, our flourishing is not isolated from others, but happens within a community of others with which we have relations. In this way a eudaimonistic theory will necessarily consider 'others' when the focus is on relationality rather than individuality. Given that a eudaimonistic framework seems to fit well with the relational approach this project has thus far endorsed, we can begin to consider a eudaimonistic approach in more detail.

In taking a relational eudaimonistic approach, we will naturally consider how we relate to other beings in our world. For most eudaimonistic traditions, flourishing necessarily involved virtue, however possessing virtue was not always sufficient to achieve flourishing. In book VIII of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle says that "without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods" (1155a5). Aristotle makes clear throughout his ethics that friends are necessary for anyone hoping to achieve flourishing. The important connection that I take Aristotle to be making is that because we are fundamentally social beings, our social networks and communities will play a central role in our flourishing. This is because flourishing, as characterized by Aristotle, will be relative to the kind of thing that flourishes. We must first ask what human life consists in, then flourishing will be characterized by the best version of whatever that is. If we take humans to be fundamentally social beings, as Aristotle did, then human flourishing would include the best version of our social connections. With this in mind it seems apparent that a social being cannot flourish without strong connections to their social environment, but more needs to be said about what it means to say that humans are fundamentally social.

Our social network impacts a large part of who we become and is one of the central constructs through which we derive meaning and fulfillment. In short, friends make us who we are and true friends make our lives better. Another way to articulate this Aristotelian idea that humans are social beings is to say that the human self is best described as relational which means that the development of the self happens through and is partly constituted by social connections. Jean Grimshaw writes, "Human needs and interests arise in a context of relationships with other people, and human needs for relationships with other people cannot be understood as merely instrumental

to isolable individual ends" (Grimshaw, 1993:175). Grimshaw and others point out that describing humans as relational in this way provides the most adequate description of our actual human situation when compared to alternatives. If we were to view humans as isolated individuals with self-contained interests and desires, the interests of others could not be central to my own. These interests would be seen as independent, requiring no essential reference to one another in order to be understood. On this view, teaching my younger brother how to string his guitar is explained by the satisfaction I get from helping him , without necessary reference to the interests of my brother. My interests would be isolated from the particular connections to those in my network. The problem here is that this view does not acknowledge that I might teach my brother how to string his guitar for his own sake and not simply because it satisfies one of my desires. On the other hand, I could take on my brother's desire as my own, displacing my selfish desire to be a good brother. This denies or at least subordinates my desire as it takes the desire of the other as the ultimate end. So, we either end up with a version of egoism (taking my interests as the ultimate end) that considers the interests of others as merely accidental or instrument, or a version of altruism (taking the interests of others as the ultimate end) that makes my interests secondary (Grimshaw, 1993; Plumwood, 1993).

A more accurate description would be that I teach my brother how to string his guitar for the sake of his happiness *as well as* my own. His happiness is not merely an instrument for me achieving happiness nor is his happiness more central to my desires than mine is. Val Plumwood writes, "we can give a much better account of social life by treating individuals as having interdependent interests and needs which make essential and not merely accidental reference to

those of others" (Plumwood, 1993: 153). My brother's interests are not merely accidental to mine. This means that my brother's interests could not be otherwise while mine remain the same. This is because my brother's interests are an essential part of my interests (I help my brother for his own sake) so a change in his interests would necessarily change mine. Overlooking the role that his needs and interests play in my life and decision-making misrepresents our relationship. A relational selfhood gives an account of social life that acknowledges these interdependent interests in a way that other accounts simply cannot.

Once we acknowledge that my interests and the interests of those in my network are interdependent, then it becomes clear that a relational selfhood makes the most sense of this reality. If we assume that my identity develops through and is partly constituted by my social connections then it makes sense why my interests and my brother's interests might overlap without either of our interests being subordinated or instrumentalized. Our interests are interdependent and thus co-constituted as my interests will partly depend on my brother's and vice versa. This is not to say that people do not make decisions for purely self-interested or selfless reasons, only that the view that the self is isolated and independent of the others in our network leaves out a significant aspect of our social experience. Accordingly, a view of the self as isolated and independent leaves out a significant aspect of what it is to live a good life. As I will articulate in more detail below, the view of the self as partly constituted by our relations can give a more comprehensive explanation of our life and what it means for our life to go well, or to flourish.

So, to say that humans are fundamentally social is to say that the self is best understood as partly constituted by our interpersonal relations. It then follows that our interpersonal relations are

constituents of our flourishing as they play a direct role in making up our lives and whether our lives go better or worse. Aristotle made the point that our social relations are crucial to our lives going well, but many contemporary philosophers have argued that the relational nature of the self is not exhausted by social relations. In the next section I will explain how our ecological relations constitute the self in a way similar to our social relations. This argument will ground the claim that our ecological relations are valuable as constituents of our flourishing.

The Ecological Self

As many in the ecofeminist literature have pointed out, human relations are not exclusively social but ecological as well (Warren 1990; Plumwood 1991; 1993). This means that our social relations do not exhaust the kinds of relations that make up our lives and the kinds of beings we are. As Plumwood puts it, the ecological self "can be viewed as a type of relational self, one which which includes the goal of the flourishing of earth others and the earth community among its own primary ends, and hence respects or cares for these others for their own sake" (Plumwood 1991:154). We are embedded in and constituted by both social and ecological communities and as a result our flourishing is connected to that of others. So, while my connection to the Rocky Mountains may not be described as strictly 'social', it still makes up a part of me and my life. Our lives are constituted by a wide range of relations that span from other people to the countless objects in our surrounding environment.

A view of the self as ecological recognizes humans and nature as co-constituted to some degree. This means that I will partly make up the life of the others that I am in connection with and vice-versa. Just as with the idea of the social self, the ecological self is grounded in the

understanding of an interdependence between humans and nonhuman others. It is not simply an interdependence relation in which we merely rely on others, instrumentally, in order to achieve flourishing but rather that part of what it means to be who we are has to do with our relations. If our lives are co-constituted in this way, then our relationships will play a central role in our flourishing. I have made clear what is meant by an 'ecological self' and now wish to make the parallel between the social self described in the previous section and the ecological self to make the case that our ecological relations play the same kind of role in our lives and in our flourishing.

As with the example of me and my brother given above, a view of the self as independent with isolable ends cannot make sense of how I might desire that Mt. Shasta remain vibrant and healthy for the sake of the ecosystem itself, while at the same time acknowledging that the health of Mt. Shasta serves my individual interests as well. Human interests are interdependent with those of ecological others, just as they are with social others, and as such humans are not best understood simply in terms of isolated individuals. Rather, individual humans should be understood to be in constant relation with numerous social and ecological others. If the ends of ecological others were only ever instrumental to our own ends rather than central to our own then there would be no need for a view of the self as ecological. However, it is the case that humans often have non-instrumental relationships with nature in which we desire the achievement of the end of an ecological other for their own sake *in addition* to our own interests, and not merely as instruments for achieving those interests. I can nurture my house plants because they add aesthetic qualities to my home but also because I recognize the plants to have a good of their own that I wish to promote for their own sake. In this way I can have my own aesthetic interests in mind but also the interests

of the plants to live good lives. Accordingly, in describing my interests we must make essential reference to the interests of my plants as well. Furthermore, these interests for ecological others arise because we exist in a particular ecological context. For example, someone growing up in Northern California may develop a particular fondness for Redwood trees that becomes part of who they are. Our needs and interests arise within an ecological context just as they do within a social context.

This idea of the relational self is well established in the feminist literature and has also influenced theories in philosophy of mind about the self. Kathleen Wallace develops what she calls the "cumulative network model" of the self in which she argues that the self *is* a network of relations. Wallace claims that "the overall character of the self is constituted by the unique interrelatedness of its particular relational traits" (Wallace, 2019: 197). What Wallace and other relational accounts emphasize is that selves are not simple, self-contained units but rather we are constituted by a rich and complex network of relations. While Wallace does not make any explicit mention of human relations to nonhuman nature, her theory seems to accommodate a view of the ecological self as she explicitly states that our network of relations are not merely social and that the "self is relational throughout." If we want to capture the full range of humanness, it would be an oversight not to account for our extra-social relationality. Labeling humans as social beings leaves out much of the picture and assumes that our extra-social relations are irrelevant with respect to a typical human life. Our relations with places, pets and a range of other living beings are not strictly social yet they are central to our lives. I argue, explicitly, later in this chapter that evidence from social psychology shows that the fundamentality of relations is in part due to a basic human need for connectedness that is fulfilled by more than our social relations.

These extra-social relations are more often instrumentalized, however, in comparison to our social relations. Most people recognize the intrinsic value of interpersonal friendship or love but see the rest of our relations as instruments to achieve other goods. For example, many people promote the well-being of their animals purely as means to satisfy their own interests (i.e. breeding dogs purely for financial gain). This is simply a mistake in assuming that our extra-social relations could not be significant parts of our flourishing the same way that our interpersonal relations often are. In doing so we would deprive ourselves of developing rich and meaningful relationships that have the potential to directly contribute to our flourishing. On this view we are ecological beings and because of this our flourishing is constituted by the full range of relations that make up who we are. Cultivating and maintaining the right kinds of relationships (beyond the interpersonal) is crucial to cultivate the best possible network and thereby the best possible life.

To say that humans are ecological is not to make the claim that we are somehow "one with nature", but rather that the best way to understand humans is as beings that are partly constituted by their relations to nonhuman nature. This view opposes an isolated individualism without leaning into an idea of oneness with nature. We can acknowledge our inherent relationality with the rest of nature while still recognizing others as others with their own distinct, yet interdependent interests. We can understand ourselves as individuals with distinct needs and desires while also recognizing that our relations with those others make up part of what we call the individual. This approach leaves more room for particularity as this relational account does not claim that humans and nature are necessarily identical in any way–only that we are intimately connected through our relations.

While relations to nonhuman nature may contribute to flourishing, some might ask whether they are really necessary for flourishing. Someone living in a dense urban environment their whole life with a rich social network might say that these extra-social relations do not play a role in their flourishing. What this approach fails to acknowledge is that as long as we are in an environment that is not strictly social or interpersonal (and, as a matter of fact, we always are in such an environment), our relational network will go beyond the social. A flourishing that does not account for extra-social relations only seems plausible if we abstract ourselves out of our actual social and environmental context. As O'neill and colleagues point out in the opening pages of their book, we live "in, from and with the world" (Oneill et al., 2008). We are always situated *in* a space–in an environment *from* which we sustain our lives. We also live *with*–alongside a world that was living before we came around and will continue on living after us. As one key example, our relation to place, which includes our relation to our general ecological environment, is often characterized as a critical dimension of our overall well-being (Russell et al., 2013; Ryff, 1989). This puts all of us in a clear and important relation to our environment that we ought to recognize. Even the most urban spaces will be partly constituted by natural elements, like the air we breathe and exposure to sunlight. Whether we live in New York City or Yosemite Valley our network of relations that make up who we are will include relations with our natural environment.

In taking ourselves to be ecological beings, we recognize that the self and ecological others are partly co-constituted, thereby establishing the central importance of our ecological relations. One example of this is the idea that you are what you are partly due to the place you are in, and that place is also what it is in part because you are in it. In developing a sense of place, a sense of

connectedness to the particular place we inhabit, a generic "place" becomes a home and also a part of who we are. Even if not strictly essential, these ecological relationships are significant parts of our identity. What this means is that if we were to relocate and lose that connectedness to place, while our identity would not completely fall apart, a significant aspect of our identity would be lost. A eudaimonistic account follows well from this idea as it takes into account the value of this wide range of particular relations as constituents of our flourishing. Realizing that the self is partly constituted by ecological relations, it becomes clear that the quality of those relations will have a direct impact on our life going well. Recall that in establishing what a good life looks like we must determine what life generally consists in. Our life being constituted by our ecological relations entails the importance of these relations in our flourishing.

Harmony and the Ecological Self

I can be said to be living in harmony with my network just in case all of the connections in my network are those of good relationships (those conducive to flourishing). If our goal is the best possible life, and good relationships partly constitute the best possible life, then ensuring that we are living in harmony with our environment is an essential component to flourishing. If only some of our relationships are good, we cannot be maximally flourishing since our other relationships could be better and so would make our life better. So, once we take on this relational eudaimonism, one of the main goals reasonably becomes cultivating harmony which is a result of cultivating good relations throughout the networks that make up who we are. If we take ourselves to be part of an ecological whole, then the harmony of our network (in which the parts of the network are co-constituted) becomes an intuitive and fundamental goal. Humans cannot be understood as

removed from the context of relationships, and human needs for relationships are not merely instrumental to our ends but a part of our self-realization. A relational selfhood as described in the preceding sections emphasizes the importance of our relationships in that it recognizes our relationships as constituent parts of our lives. A relational theory motivates that goal of establishing harmony and provides guidance about how to achieve it. When relations become central, harmony is not simply a byproduct but a central end in achieving my flourishing. The rest of this section will be dedicated to describing how harmony fits within this eudaimonistic picture and what it might look like in practice.

The concept of harmony recognizes our interdependence but also co-constitution with our network. It also implies that living and flourishing will be a mutual endeavor among the constituent parts of our lives. Human flourishing cannot be accomplished without harmony as harmony denotes a set of flourishing relationships necessary for humans to flourish. Within the ecological self approach, we are partly constituted by our relations and as a result our flourishing will depend on the quality of these relations, which I understand to be the extent to which they contribute to flourishing. In this way the idea of harmony and the idea of the relational self go hand-in-hand. The quality of the relations will be directly correlated with the quality of the network. It follows from this that harmony be a clear goal for living well.

While contemporary western philosophy has brought this relational framework into the current philosophical conversation, this is by no means a novel approach to living well. There are a number of examples that come from American Indigenous traditions that exhibit approaches to living that emphasize our relations to our environment. As mentioned in the previous chapter,

Winona LaDuke writes of *Minobimaatisiiwin,* or the "good life" as the "basic objective of the Anishinabeg and Cree people" of the northern region of North America (LaDuke, 1994: 128). One of the core principles that guides this approach to living well is reciprocal relations. Reciprocal relations "defines responsibilities and ways of relating between humans and the ecosystem" (LaDuke, 1994: 128). Our relations to other humans and the rest of the world are central to what it means to live a good life. On this view, the good life implies connectedness, interdependence and good relations. An understanding of the need for balance and harmony is built into this conception of flourishing. Frameworks like these situate humans as existing within a larger network of relations from which it naturally follows that these relations ought to be a central focus in our pursuit of a good life. Approaches that take seriously our web of relations have guided indigenous peoples and societies to live in ways that would be considered sustainable by any standard.

When we isolate ourselves from this web of relations by overlooking its role in our lives our flourishing as well as that of the rest of our diverse earth community suffers. Robin Wall Kimmerer, who is of Anishinaabe ancestry, writes that this results in what has been called "species loneliness" (Kimmerer, 2017: 375). Kimmerer describes this as a sadness that results from our estrangement from the rich range of beings in our environment.[2] Put in terms of harmony, disconnection from the natural world is a sign of the neglect of ecological relationships and as such, a sign of a lack of harmony. This kind of disconnection is so ubiquitous in our current society it often goes unnoticed. Many of us do not put enough thought into where our food comes from, where waste is

[2] It is important to note here that those considered to be "beings" by many indigenous traditions were not limited to the kinds of things we consider to be beings in our western culture. The Anishinaabeg language speaks of things like rocks, rivers and mountains as animate.

disposed of, and how our lives are deeply intertwined with the rest of our environment. With all of the great advances of society that make our lives seemingly better in some ways, we have also made it much easier to lose touch with our connection to the natural world. Frameworks like that of indigenous traditions and the one I am proposing emphasizes our connectedness and the importance of these relations with regard to our own well-being. In enacting these ethical outlooks on how we should live, not only only will our environment become healthier, our lives will be better as well. While I find this point intuitively and conceptually plausible, there have also been numerous studies conducted in well-being research that support this idea that connectedness to nature has a positive effect on our quality of life.

Nature Connectedness and Well-Being

Environmentalists and psychologists alike have suggested that nature connectedness is a fundamental human necessity. Many have suggested that relatedness in general is a foundational psychological necessity. Ryan and Deci's self determination theory describes the three basic psychological needs as autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Relatedness here refers to the psychological needs to feel belonging or connectedness. With regard to nature, the idea is that in developing relations with nature we can help satisfy this basic psychological need for connection which then aids our flourishing. Others have investigated how nature relatedness might be distinct from other forms of relatedness (family and friends for example) and as such had its own distinct impacts on happiness (Zelenski and Nisbet, 2014). These psychological explanations corroborate ideas about a basic human need for connectedness that is implied by a relational conception of flourishing such as the one I have put forth here. If relatedness is a basic

psychological need, then any theory aimed at guiding us to live the best life possible ought to say something about our relations.

Ryan and Deci's basic psychological needs also include autonomy and competence. There is a plethora of evidence to suggest that nature exposure and connection has a positive influence on these basic psychological needs as well. Relatedness, competence and autonomy are commonly considered to be a few among a range of dimensions that researchers consider to be constituents of human well-being. In this literature, well-being is commonly divided into subcategories of hedonic well-being (HWB) and eudaimonic well-being (EWB) where HWB refers to "feeling good" an EWB refers to a wider range of dimensions that have to do with "functioning well" such as competence and relatedness. Making a sharp distinction between HWB and EWB is unimportant with respect to the current project for two reasons. First, both HWB and EWB dimensions are significantly and positively correlated with nature connectedness. This means that the evidence supports the claim that connection to nature improves well-being in a general way whether it be hedonic or eudaimonic. The second reason is that someone who is flourishing (EWB) will be generally pleased with their life–their life will typically "feel good" (HWB).

EWB and HWB are intimately related and intertwined with each other. Things that make us feel good can help lead to a flourishing life and those things that are generally considered eudaimonic dimensions of well-being often lead to our lives feeling good. For this reason (and because this is how I interpret the focus of much of the well-being research,) in this project I will be using well-being as a general stand-in for flourishing . The main difference between well-being as a complex constituted by a number of dimensions (i.e. identity, relatedness, sense of place) and this

relational account of flourishing is that instead of recognizing our relationality in a single well-being dimension (relatedness), my account of flourishing recognizes that relationality permeates many dimensions of well-being. For example, identity, sense of place, belonging, and other well-being dimensions are inherently relational concepts given the acceptance of the relational self. This idea will become clearer in the discussion of some specific well-being dimensions below.

In a meta-analysis on nature's effect on well-being, Russel et al. (2013) identified and analyzed the impact of nature exposure on ten different critical dimensions of well-being:

- Physical health
- Spirituality
- Learning/capability
- Sense of place
- Connectedness/belonging
- Mental health
- Certainty and sense of control
- Inspiration/fulfillment of imagination
- Identity/autonomy
- Subjective well-being

For each of these well-being dimensions, researchers found evidence to support the idea that exposure to nature, whether in terms of knowing about, perceiving, interacting with or living in nature, has a positive impact on well-being. They conclude that "the nonmaterial connections between people and their environment are strong, cosmopolitan and necessary for human well-being" (Russel et al., 2013: 493). While this is evidence that nature increases our well-being, Mayer and colleagues found that our connectedness to nature in particular, partially mediates the

relationship between nature exposure and well-being (Mayer et al., 2009). What this means is that not only does nature exposure make our lives better, but our connectedness to nature plays a key role in the impact of nature on well-being.[3] By fostering good relations with nature like care and respect, we potentially open up pathways by which nature can have a direct impact on our flourishing.

There are two connected but distinct conclusions to draw from this research that I will summarize in order to make my point clear. First is that our exposure to nature positively impacts a number of well-being dimensions, including relatedness (connectedness/belonging). This relatedness dimension is implicit in the concepts of sense of place and constitutive value discussed in chapter 1, as these were discussed as methods of describing our feelings of connection to nonhuman others. This supports the idea that nature plays a key role in cultivating relations that satisfy our need for connection and as a result plays a key role in our flourishing. The second is that connectedness to nature in particular allows us to experience nature in fulfilling and meaningful ways which also leads to a positive impact on well-being or flourishing. So it is not merely exposure to nature that has a direct impact on well-being but it is our connection to nature that mediates this impact. This is further evidence to support the claim that our flourishing is partly constituted by our relationships to nonhuman nature.

Fostering a deeper connectedness to nature through cultivating our relations directly contributes to flourishing in its own right. Having these good relations with nature makes it so that

[3] Webber et al. (2015) and Pensini et al. (2016) also find evidence that nature connectedness mediates the relationship between exposure to nature and well-being.

our experiences of nature can have the significant impacts on our well-being that this research would suggest them to have. The point that I hope this discussion makes clear is that the idea that our relationships in general, and our relationships to nature in particular, are fundamental to human flourishing is well-supported by psychological research. It is those relations to nature and the connectedness that arises out of those relationships that make it possible for these well-being effects to be realized. Good relationships with nature help make flourishing possible.

Concerns with Ecological Eudaimonism

There are a few general concerns one might have with this approach that I will take a moment to address here. The first is that eudaimonistic views are too egocentric to recognize the proper value of nature in a way that ensures we respect and protect it. In making the focus of ethics the human experience and the human good, we are not allocating proper attention to nature, which is what a good environmental ethical theory ought to do. While it may be said that a relational eudaimonism is "human-centered", this characterization would be an oversimplified and uncharitable characterization of the view. A better one-sentence characterization would be that the ecological theory of human flourishing is centered around human *relations*. A significant difference is that our relations to others are a focal point of our flourishing and as such the approach will consider nonhuman others as an foundational part of our flourishing.

The claim that this approach is egocentric in a problematic way is implied by the traditional conception of the self as one that has independent interests isolable from those of others. From this vantage point, making human flourishing of the self our primary focus will exclude or diminish nonhuman as the kinds of things that many environmental ethicists believe deserve moral

consideration. It might be that a eudaimonistic account views nonhuman nature as merely materially instrumental to our basic needs that then allow us to flourish. However, the relational eudaimonism I propose does not assume an isolated, individualistic self and thus, can avoid this criticism. In taking the self to be ecological my flourishing necessarily implies the flourishing of my network to some extent as this network is in fact part of what makes up the self. As stated earlier in the chapter, this is not to say that 'self' and 'other' are illusions but that the human self cannot be properly understood without reference to a network of relations. Understanding the self as ecological means understanding the self as distinct yet conceived with the understanding of its co-constitution with the natural environment, as is made clear in previous discussion about a relational, ecological self. In taking the view of the ecological self through this relational lens, flourishing becomes ecological rather than strictly egoistic.

To support this point, I can point again to indigenous traditions mentioned previously as examples of a focus on relations that most would not criticize as egocentric. For the Anishinaabe, living the "good life" is defined in terms of good relations. As a result, care for the nonhuman world becomes a primary focus to achieve flourishing. The good life is a life of good relations and will not take the purely "human good" as the most important element of existence because the human good itself is a complex made up of relations to the existence of others.

With regard to this idea of the ecological self, one might ask why the self is ecological rather than a more generally relational self. One could take the idea of the relational self and say that it is not only our ecological environment but that *all* of our relations constitute the self. To a certain degree, I am sympathetic to an idea of the self as relational in this broader sense and do not wish to

necessarily exclude broader relational views of the self by promoting a view of the self as ecological. However, while we as humans are constantly in relation to things beyond the social and ecological, I do not think that all of these relationships will contribute to our flourishing in the same that our social and ecological relations do.

It may be the case that relations to the entire environment make up any particular human being, but this does not make it the case that my relationship to my local Target should be one that I take to be a significant part of my flourishing. This is because Target is not the kind of thing that I can have an ideal relationship with: one that is caring, reciprocal and respectful. Recall that care requires particular affective attitudes and caring acts towards the other but also responsiveness from the other. It is hard to imagine how someone would have this kind of caring relation with Target. I might have caring attitudes and actions towards my local Target but I am doubtful as to whether I would get any meaningful responsiveness from my local Target on a level that would constitute a caring relation. I can imagine having a reciprocal relation with my local Target but reciprocity alone does not constitute an ideally good relationship. A relationship without one of the three relations discussed in chapter 2 will be lacking something important to the potential contribution the relationship can make toward flourishing. This is not to say that a relationship missing one of these relations is in some sense bad, only that it is not ideal and the ideal is what we ought to be striving for.

Further, while this reciprocity I have with Target might contribute to my flourishing, this will be in an indirect way. It will be the fruits of this reciprocity (the products I get from Target) that contribute to flourishing but the relationship itself will not play the same direct role in my

flourishing as an ideal relationship will. My relationship with Target will be instrumental to my flourishing but will not directly constitute a part of my flourishing. Thinking back to the farmers market vendor from chapter 2, we can see how this can apply similarly to interpersonal relations as well. If I have a purely reciprocal relation with a vendor at a farmers market, this relationship is not bad, but it is the material benefits received from the reciprocity that contribute to my flourishing rather than the relationship itself playing a constitutive role. The difference between Target and the vendor at the farmers market is that Target does not seem like the kind of thing I can cultivate an ideal relationship with while I could conceivably cultivate a valuable friendship with the vendor. The vendor could become a friend with whom I share caring, reciprocal and respectful relations.

I can acknowledge, however, that there may be things beyond the social and ecological with which I *can* have an ideally good relationships. I can imagine someone who has a relationship with their home that is constituted by caring, reciprocal and respectful relations. However, the point I want to make is that not *all* of my relationships will have the same significance in terms of my flourishing. What things I might have significant relationships with will depend on with what I can conceivably cultivate caring, reciprocal and respectful relations. Social and ecological relationships seem to be paradigmatic examples of relationships that can contribute to flourishing in this way which is why those are the only two explicitly discussed here. So, while I do not deny that humans may be more broadly relational than I have explicitly laid out here, not all of our relationships are the kinds that we should be focussed on when our end is living the best possible life.

Having established an ecological conception of the self, corroborated by psychological evidence cited above, we seem to have a need for connectedness to nature that meaningfully

constitutes our living well. Our relations to other things like Target, however do not share the same kind of constitution relation. It is this constitution relation that makes our ecological relations especially morally relevant when considering human flourishing as our primary end. Our ecological relationships are a rich and fundamental constituent to our flourishing in a way that many of our other relationships are not.

Conclusion

An ecological eudaimonistic account recognizes and takes as morally significant our particular relationships to our ecological environments. In recognizing the self as ecological, it is clear that our ecological relations are part of what it is for humans to flourish. Our human flourishing is not just our own, as our network of relations makes up part of our being and without a healthy network of relations our flourishing suffers. In this way cultivating good relations with the nonhuman world is imperative and central to achieve flourishing. Good relations make good networks which explains the value of cultivating care, respect, and reciprocity amongst our ecological network.

I have cited empirical evidence that supports the idea that these relations to nature do in fact lead to flourishing, indicated by a number of well-being dimensions. Cultivating valuable ecological relations is not only good for humans, this will also lead to favorable outcomes for nature. This is of course implied by an ecological view of the self, but, is worth emphasizing some predictable practical outcomes of cultivating good ecological relations. We might think twice about needlessly killing and mistreating animals, clear-cutting forests, polluting rivers, and enacting unsustainable farming practices if we created these meaningful and ethically significant

relationships to nonhuman nature. “Living well” does not only include my life but the complex and interrelated interplay of life among beings in our ecological environment.

Before closing, it will be worthwhile to summarize what it is we get as a result of approaching environmental ethics from a relational view that we do not get with the traditional approach of starting from general principles and finding out where and how they apply. As briefly covered in chapter 1, environmental ethics has typically attempted to figure out what kinds of things intrinsic value, moral consideration or some other moral concept apply to. We might apply a particular moral principle to sentient beings or beings that are subjects of a life. The problem with this approach is that it often leaves us with an incomplete picture of the morally relevant facts. If we start with general principles then we are likely to overlook particular aspects of our lives that are morally relevant–aspects like features of our environments that make our particular relationships significant.

The advantage of a relational view is that we are not forced to think in terms of universal criteria like “person” or “sentient being” and can instead focus on terms and conditions that specify the context of the situation or relationship. Rather than thinking, “that is Margaret, a sentient being that merits care or respect due to this or that fact about her,” I can instead see Margaret as Margaret and all the unique particularities of Margaret and our relationship. I can begin to think in terms of contextual particularity which is essential for characterizing any relationship. These particularities will be apparent in the ways that care, respect and reciprocity show up in relationships. Our lives are not simply made up of general kinds, these kinds are always instantiated

in particulars. An approach that starts with general kinds makes particulars more difficult to acknowledge.

A relational approach will acknowledge particulars, as relationships are between particular subjects. When we start with particular relationships we can recognize these general qualities like sentience and well-being but we can also acknowledge particular and unique features of the other that make the particular relationship significant. General qualities like sentience capture valuable qualities that apply both to humans and nonhumans. However, if we begin with particular beings in particular relations we can recognize sameness between humans and nonhumans but also recognize qualities in nonhumans as worthy of respect or care that humans do not share. Instead of starting with the question of what it is that makes my dog morally significant we can start with the question of what it is about *my* dog that makes our relationship morally significant. I might care for my dog because my dog has a well-being of his own but also because of particular features of our relationship that I recognize as worthy of care. If we want a complete picture of flourishing, we cannot leave out our relationships as our relationships make up such a significant part of our lives.

What I hope we can take away from this project, is that there is good reason to acknowledge that our relationships to the nonhuman natural world are ethically significant. These relationships make us who we are and play a crucial role in our lives going better or worse. I propose that the best relationships will be made up of care, reciprocity and respect, so these are the relations we ought to be cultivating. Caring is characterized by beneficial actions towards another motivated by affective attitudes that results in some kind of perceivable responsiveness on the part of the cared-for. A relationship made up of only caring, as described here, can be made better if it were also reciprocal.

Recall that reciprocity is characterized by a mutually beneficial exchange within a context of interdependence between those in relation. Reciprocity adds a mutuality to care that acknowledges the interdependence of 'I' and 'other'. Respect adds an appreciation of the object of respect, in all of its particularity, as valuable . These three relations, when combined, put together a blueprint for what the best kind of relationship with the nonhuman world might look like. If we can cultivate our relationships with the nonhuman natural world according to what I have described here, I find it likely that our lives as well as the lives of all those that we share the earth with will be changed for the better.

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