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What Is Appropriate Use?

Précis: Not all cases in which humans use something to promote an end are cases where the thing used has instrumental value, since an object has instrumental value only if it is used to promote a *good* end. However, there are cases where a means is used to promote an end which would otherwise have been a good end but because of the inappropriateness of the means, it is not a good end. For example, in a case where an athlete uses an illicit performance-enhancing substance to win an athletic competition, the victory is not a good thing, since the means to achieve it are corrupt. Likewise, when humans use nature for our own ends, the value of the ends may be lessened or absent if our use of nature is inappropriate. For example, if we clear-cut an old-growth forest, it is arguable that what we build out of the forest is a lesser good than if we had built the same thing using more appropriate means. We are thus in need of an account of appropriate use if we wish to understand which of our ends are in fact good ends. After considering and rejecting several possible accounts, I argue that *a means is used appropriately just in case the system that is comprised of the user and the means used is a good system*, and I provide a brief sketch of this systemic account and its consequences.

1. The Anti-Moorean argument

According to G.E. Moore, the intrinsic value of an object depends only on the object's intrinsic qualities. Moore writes: "To say that a kind of value is 'intrinsic' means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question."¹ Any two objects that have the same physical properties will have the same amount of intrinsic value. This view is commonly called *Mooreanism* about value, and is endorsed by Richard Brandt, William Frankena, and Roderick Chisholm, among others.² Recently, Shelly Kagan³ has attacked Mooreanism, though it is unclear whether Kagan's

¹ G.E. Moore, "The Conception of Intrinsic Value", in *Philosophical Studies*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922, p. 260.

² Richard Brandt, *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1959; William Frankena, *Ethics*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963; Roderick Chisholm,

arguments are successful.⁴ I believe that Mooreanism is false for reasons that differ from Kagan's, and these reasons will be the subject of the present section.⁵

The motivation behind Mooreanism is simple enough – the value of a thing supervenes on the intrinsic qualities of the thing itself, and if two things are identical in their intrinsic qualities, then because value supervenes on intrinsic qualities, the value of the two things will be identical. Moore provides a test, the *isolation* test,⁶ in which we can test our intuitions about intrinsic value by considering a possible world in which only that object exists. If that possible world is better than a possible world in which nothing exists, then the object has intrinsic value. This kind of thought experiment laid the groundwork for Richard (Routley) Sylvan's 'last man' thought experiment.⁷ I will not dwell on the relation between Moore's argument and Sylvan's, but we should note one difference between the two: in thought experiments like Sylvan's,⁸ a person destroys a tree; in thought experiments like Moore's, a tree is the only thing that does exist. One might respond to Sylvan (in what I take to be the spirit of an environmental virtue ethic) by claiming that it is really the viciousness of the act that makes us believe that the act of cutting down a tree is wrong, and thus even though most people react negatively to the action of cutting down the tree, that might not show that it has intrinsic value – it might just show that the individual in question has a poor character. By setting a tree apart from human activity, Moore's

"Intrinsic Value," In Alvin Goldman and Jaegwon Kim, eds., *Values and Morals*, Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1978.

³ Shelly Kagan, "Rethinking Intrinsic Value," *The Journal of Ethics* 2 (1998), pp. 277-97.

⁴ I believe that most of Kagan's objections fail, but I shall not discuss the reasons here. For a response to Kagan, see Ben Bradley, "Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value", *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 9: 111-130 (2006).

⁵ The argument in this section is the subject of another paper of mine ("What is Instrumental Value?"), presented at the ISEE session at the Eastern Division of the APA, December, 2007).

⁶ See Moore, *Principia Ethica* Cambridge University Press, 1903, Ch. 1.

⁷ Richard Routley, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" (1973), reprinted in Zimmerman et al, eds., *Environmental Philosophy*. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001, pp. 17-25.

⁸ See David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willot, "Introduction: Why Environmental Ethics", in Schmidtz and Willot, eds., *Environmental Ethics*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. xiii for this kind of example.

isolation test avoids this complication about what may be driving our intuitive response to Sylvan's case.

However, there is reason to believe that the isolation test is problematic and that Mooreanism is false. First I provide two counterexamples to Mooreanism, and then I shall say more about why we should not have expected it to be correct in the first place.

Counterexample 1: Consider an athlete who uses illicit performance-enhancing drugs to win a competition. The end, of winning the competition, would otherwise have been a good end. However, in the particular case where the athlete uses performance-enhancing drugs, the athlete's victory is not a good end because the means used to attain the end are corrupt.⁹

I am not claiming that because of the use of the performance-enhancing substance, the athlete's winning the competition has no intrinsic value whatsoever. I am merely claiming that if we consider the value of the end of winning the competition in two different possible worlds, in one of which the athlete has trained strenuously and won, and the other in which the athlete has not trained as strenuously but wins because of the advantage gained from the drug, we should

⁹ To make the example work, we must consider the performance-enhancing substance used by the athlete to not be explicitly banned. If the substance is explicitly banned, then it is not clear that we should say that the athlete has won the competition, even though the athlete will be given the winner's prize. The example I have in mind is one where the substance the athlete uses is against the spirit of the competition, but is not explicitly banned (perhaps since the substance is a newly-created substance that the competition committee has not yet considered whether to ban). As such, we should still say that the athlete has won the competition, but won in an inappropriate way. Furthermore, there are other ends that we can consider as candidates for having intrinsic value in the case – for example, the *pleasure* that the athlete gets upon being given the prize for winning. In *Pleasure and the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Fred Feldman discusses fine-grained states of affairs, in which, for example there is a difference between the state of affairs of an athlete experiencing pleasure from the thought that he has one the competition, and the state of affairs of the athlete experiencing pleasure *simpliciter*. On such a view, the pleasure simpliciter is still a good even if the coarser-grained pleasure is not. However, this move seems wrong: even though there are finer- and coarser-grained *descriptions* of the state of affairs, both descriptions are of one and the same state of affairs – there are not two metaphysically different things. The end has the same value regardless of how it is described, even though on some descriptions we might be inclined to attribute to it more intrinsic value than on other descriptions. Lastly, I should note that in this paper I shall use the word “end” loosely to denote either an object which is produced using certain means, or a state of affairs which is the outcome of a causal process involving the use of a means. There is much debate about whether intrinsic value is a property of objects or states of affairs see Bradley (“Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value”) for some discussion; I shall for this paper allow that both states of affairs and objects can possess intrinsic value.

say that the end in the former world is better than in the latter – even if all the intrinsic properties of the victory are identical in the two worlds. Mooreanism is false.

Counterexample 2: This second counterexample is distasteful to consider, and I include it only because an interesting analogy can be made with issues of environmental value. Normally, sexual gratification is a good end. However, there are cases when it is not – cases of rape, for example. The pleasure an assailant gets in such a case is not a good end, even though sexual pleasure is in general a good end.

I mention this example since it is common for those concerned about the environment to describe an activity (such as strip mining or clear-cutting) as a “rape of the earth”. Although of course for many reasons this is not a perfect analogy, I do believe that there is something analogous between the two examples and that we should say that the value of the end achieved in an environmentally inappropriate way has less value than an end achieved in an environmentally appropriate way. For example, if we clear-cut an old-growth forest, what we build out of the forest is a lesser good than if we had built the same thing using more appropriate means. Although I have not yet argued for this first-order claim, I hope that by the end of the paper it will seem right (if it doesn’t already).

It should be clear that Mooreanism is false. There are cases where the intrinsic qualities of ends are identical to the intrinsic qualities of ends in other possible worlds where the ends are achieved by different means, and the ends in the two possible worlds differ in intrinsic value. And the reason why we should not have expected Mooreanism to be true relates to problems in the isolation test that Moore gives. For how are we to imagine a possible world with only a tree? Where exactly did that tree come from? Was it created *ex nihilo*? If so, should we even consider it to be a tree? All trees have evolutionary histories. This object, if it lacks an evolutionary

history, might be a tree-shaped object, but is it actually a *tree*? Arguably, evolved biological beings are necessarily such, and thus an intrinsically identical being without an evolutionary history is not actually a biological individual.¹⁰ Furthermore, all trees have soil in which they grow; air in which to conduct gas exchange; sunlight to photosynthesize. And how warm is it in that universe? What season is it? Even if the thing that exists in that world is a tree, it does not appear that it would last more than an instant, and it is unclear how much value we should attribute to the mere instantaneous existence of such a thing. Although Moore's isolation test has the advantage over Sylvan's last person argument in that our intuitions about the character of an individual who destroys a tree do not cloud our judgment about the value of the object, it has the disadvantage of presuming that it is metaphysically possible for there to be a single tree in isolation of everything else.

Perhaps there is a way around this problem for Moore: rather than imagining a one-tree-world created *ex nihilo*, we can imagine a full-fledged world like ours in which everything but one tree has been destroyed in an instant. Perhaps this would allow for the possibility of something like Moore's isolation test. But it wouldn't be a possible world in which only the tree existed, and thus wouldn't really test the very thing that the isolation test is supposed to test: whether the tree's value is determined solely by its intrinsic qualities. When we imagine a world in which there is only a tree, we – at least, this is what happens when *I* try to do so – simply have a picture of a flourishing tree going about its business all by itself. But upon reflection, this picture is either incoherent, or, if it is coherent, does not prove that value is dependent solely upon the object's intrinsic qualities.

So we are left both without a simple test to determine the intrinsic value of a thing and with the view that, contrary to Moore and others, the intrinsic value of a thing or an end is

¹⁰ Cf. Fred Dretske, *Naturalizing the Mind*, MIT Press, 1997, pp. 158f for some remarks suggestive of a similar view.

dependent upon the appropriateness of the means. Since I believe that the concept of intrinsic value has independent coherence aside from the isolation test,¹¹ I shall put aside the former point and in what follows focus on the latter.

2. Three potential accounts of appropriate use

If I am correct that the intrinsic value of an end is dependent upon the appropriateness of the means used to obtain the end, then it is important to give some account of the appropriateness of means to an end. This is a project I will be unable to complete in this single paper, but my goal in the paper is to provide at least a sketch of an answer. In this section I consider three potential accounts that do not work, and then in the next section state my positive account.

A first potential approach is a deontological view that first demarcates *inappropriate* use and claims that appropriate use is use which is not inappropriate. On one such account, X's use of means Y is inappropriate if and only if either Y is a rational agent and X uses Y as a mere means and not as an end in itself, or if Y is used to treat rational agents as mere means and not as ends. This is one way of putting Kant's view.¹²

This view will not be adequate for our project. There are many cases of inappropriate use of non-human animals, and non-human animals do not count as rational agents in Kant's sense. A number of philosophers including Tom Regan, Paul Taylor, and Christine Korsgaard have

¹¹ Many environmental philosophers, some under the heading of 'environmental pragmatism', reject claims of intrinsic value on the grounds that it is metaphysically mysterious. I believe that such objections are unfounded. These arguments seem to assume that any account of intrinsic value must depend on a certain kind of Platonism. I believe that there are proper subjectivist accounts of intrinsic value that do not rest on such metaphysical extravagance. For those readers who are repelled by talk of 'intrinsic value', I ask that they simply consider their own preferences about how much they themselves would desire the attainment of the ends in question in this paper. This should not be metaphysically mysterious, and will allow for me to make the points I wish to make in the paper. Although some accounts of intrinsic value indeed are metaphysically mysterious, we can have a reductionist account of intrinsic value on which the intrinsic value of a thing is in some way reducible to the degree to which we would value the thing as an end in and of itself.

¹² Note that in the unfair competition case, we may say that the athlete using the performance-enhancing substance is, in so doing, not treating the other competitors as ends in themselves.

attempted to update a deontological account to apply to the non-human world, in that they claim that we should treat individuals in the non-human world with respect.¹³ However, I believe these accounts fail. First, Regan's and Taylor's deliver what I take to be absurd consequences – Regan's view has the consequence that it is *never* appropriate to use a non-human animal for our own end and Taylor holds that all living things have equal value. Though Korsgaard's view does not lead to absurd consequences, it is dubious that it is at core a Kantian account.

I do not wish to explore these objections further, since I believe there is a deeper problem in using a respect-based view for the purpose at hand. Whether or not an account of respect can be properly extended to how humans should respect non-humans, it cannot account for all that we need out of a notion of appropriate use. For not only does the notion of instrumental value apply to situations when humans use something to obtain a good, but it also applies to cases where *non-humans* use something to promote a good. So a general account of appropriate use must also determine when non-human animals' use of means is more or less appropriate. And it should be clear that if an account of appropriate use is based entirely on respect, then non-human animals cannot be said to use nature appropriately, since most if not all non-human animals do not possess the faculties to show such respect. For example, Taylor describes human hunters who deceive their prey in order to kill them, and claims that these practices are wrong.¹⁴ However, the very practices described by Taylor (hiding, keeping quiet) are practices that non-human predators employ all the time. As is generally accepted, most if not all non-human animals do not, and cannot, show other animals proper respect. But this does not entail that when they use these practices, *their* use is inappropriate.

¹³ See Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, Tom Regan, "Does Environmental Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (1992): 161–82, and Christine Korsgaard, "Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals", available at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaard/>, for attempts to adapt Kant's view.

¹⁴ Taylor, pp. 179-180.

A second idea, based upon consideration of environmental issues, is that means are used appropriately when the use of such means is *sustainable*. On this view, the reason why clear-cutting an old-growth forest is inappropriate is that doing so is not a sustainable practice. However, it can easily be shown that sustainability is not a sufficient condition for appropriate use, and an argument can show that it is not a necessary condition either. It is not sufficient since, for example, a factory in which kittens are raised and harmed for no good reason is *sustainable* in the relevant sense, but clearly is inappropriate. To show that sustainability is not necessary for appropriate use, consider again that non-human animals use things to promote their own (good) ends. For example, a panda eats bamboo to promote its ends, and such behavior is appropriate. However, we can imagine a situation where the bamboo that the panda is eating is endangered and thus the use is not sustainable. Still, it seems correct to say that the panda's use of the bamboo is appropriate. This does not entail that sustainable use is not a necessary criterion for appropriate *human* use of nature, but it does show that sustainability should not be built directly into the general concept of appropriate use.

I have based my objections to both the sustainability view and to the respect-based view on the grounds that an account of appropriate use must be continuous between human and non-human use. However, it might be objected that:

- (1) Non-human animals are not moral agents and cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.
- (2) To say that a non-human animal may use nature inappropriately is to hold the animal morally responsible.
- (3) Thus there cannot be *inappropriate* use of nature by non-human animals.
- (4) Thus a claim of *appropriate* use by animals lacks a contrast set and thus is meaningless.

The error is in (2). The sense of appropriate use at issue here is one which is used to determine the intrinsic value of the end, and is not to be used to directly determine the moral correctness of the action. So, this argument does not show that notions of "appropriate use" cannot apply to the

non-human world. And importantly, it does seem like how an animal pursues its ends does have an effect on the goodness of its ends – a black bear who feeds on human garbage is in a relevant sense worse off compared to a black bear in the wild who eats a natural diet, *even if the actual physical health of the two bears is comparable*. Garbage is not an appropriate thing for a wild animal to be eating, though we do not hold the animal morally responsible for doing so.

A third purported solution is that appropriate use is what fits in accord with our evolutionary teleology. But this account won't do, for many reasons. It might be part of our evolutionary teleology, for example, to treat outsiders without any moral consideration – so that it is evolutionarily normal to kill outsiders for our own purposes. This is highly unsatisfactory. Just because it is in our evolutionary past that we used something in a certain way does not entail that in present circumstances, using means in that way is appropriate.

3. A systemic account of appropriate use

Although none of these accounts succeeds for the purpose at hand, I believe that there is still something right about each. To help provide a positive account, let's consider some examples of cases where use of a means is indeed appropriate: An athlete works hard in her training and wins a competition; one has a nice conversation with a friend; one grows food in a garden to eat for dinner; a black bear in the wild eats its natural diet of a wide assortment of foods. What do these cases have in common?

They are all cases where the combination of means and end form a good *system*. For the athletic competition, the system of individuals training diligently and attaining skills is a good system. If the competition were a coin-flip competition, with no skill involved, then it would not be much of a competition, and winning it would not be much of a good end. The reason why winning an athletic competition is a good end is because of the work put in by all the competitors

in the spirit of competition. Conversations are good in part because of what one gains from friendship, but there is something about the very connection between friends that makes such an occasion a good thing. Growing one's own food is a good way to promote one's health, and the fact that it is such is no coincidence – by our nature we participate in such relations with the natural world. And the black bear eating its natural diet in accord with its environment is not only good for the bear but in most cases good for the broader ecosystem.

The notion of a good system is admittedly vague and in need of much further elaboration. I shall say a bit about it presently, and in the next section respond to objections to further refine the notion. Importantly, it can incorporate components of the respect-based, sustainability, and evolutionary views. When humans interact with each other, systems in which they treat each other with respect are better systems than those which are inequitable in terms of respect, or those in which no respect is shown. When humans use nature unsustainably, it is generally not a good system. And when humans and non-human animals act in ways that are in accord with their evolutionary tendencies in environments similar to those in which the tendencies were developed, it is likely a good system (even if it is not good in all cases).

A full explication and defense of the relevant notion of a system must be reserved for another occasion, but my account owes a great debt to the work of Aldo Leopold. Famously, Leopold writes “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”¹⁵ Much work has been done in an effort to incorporate the quick remark from Leopold into a larger ethical theory. For instance, it is open to the objection that it would require a large-scale elimination of humans.¹⁶ J. Baird Callicott defends a view in the spirit of Leopold according to which there are different rings of

¹⁵ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 240.

¹⁶ See William Aiken, "Ethical Issues in Agriculture," *Earthbound*, ed. Tom Regan, New York: Random House, 1984, 269.

communities – families, human communities, biotic communities, and states that we have obligations at all levels.¹⁷ James Fieser says that our obligation to biotic communities is one of many *prima facie* duties.¹⁸ James Heffernan proposes a rank-ordering of survival value of humans, survival value of non-humans, and non-survival value for humans.¹⁹

My sense is that something like Callicott's view is correct, but Callicott doesn't say enough (in that paper, at least) to sufficiently motivate his view, and much of what he says on the point is *ad hoc*. An account according to which a use is appropriate only if the means and the end together form a good system explains some of the judgments that Callicott makes. It is based in the view that humans are necessarily connected to the world outside of us. In particular, each of us is necessarily connected to the biotic systems in which we are a part, and also necessarily connected to at least some human systems outside of ourselves. Given the fact that we are essentially physical, biological organisms, our connections to the world outside of us matter. Just as rape is a corruption of the connection between two individuals, the clear-cutting of an old-growth forest and certain cruel factory farming practices, for example, are a corruption of how we ought to be connected to the natural world. In light of the fact that we are essentially a part of a number of systems in the external world, there are more and less appropriate ways to be connected to the world.

Rather than attempting a direct proof of this last point – I take it to not be something that one can rationally prove, since it appears to involve a blatant jump from *is* to *ought* – I'd like to discuss two reasons why I believe that the view is not widely held. In doing so, I hope to show that underlying some standard ways of thinking are two misguided accounts of human nature,

¹⁷ Callicott, "Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Eco-Fascism".

¹⁸ James Fieser, "Leopold And The Compatibility Of Eco-Centric Morality" *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1992, Vol. 7, pp. 37-41.

¹⁹ James D. Heffernan, "The Land Ethic: A Critical Appraisal," *Environmental Ethics*, 4, 1982, 246.

and if we can fully rid our thinking of all traces of these mistaken accounts, we should be more inclined to accept something like the view that I am proposing. The first is Cartesian dualism. It should be no surprise that ethical theories which began during the long era in which it was believed that humans are essentially immaterial substances have all tended to place value only on pleasures, or the rational will, or some combination thereof. If a Cartesian dualist metaphysics of mind were true, then I agree that it would not be so important to attend to the appropriateness of the physical means to one's ends. My systemicist view of appropriate means is an ethical outlook in accord with the now-accepted view of ourselves as embodied, biological organisms, whose ends are necessarily dependent upon our connection with other physical entities. Again, I do not take this to *prove* the ethical point, but I believe that if we rid our moral thinking of the traces of Cartesianism, then we will be naturally more inclined to care about our connectivity with the physical world. My point is not that we are still Cartesians and that we should finally abandon substance dualism; rather, it is that Cartesianism unduly influenced historical thinking about what it is good, and we have not properly rid ourselves of its influences.

A second worldview which I believe leads some people to lack proper concern for the natural world comes from a particular interpretation of the “dominion over nature” passage from Genesis 1:28. Unlike the Cartesian view, on this view we are indeed essentially connected to the natural world, but it is a natural world that was created for the benefit of humans, and as such, there is no reason to think that there is any sense of inappropriate human use of the natural world – aside from use that does not actually benefit humans. And so this view may lead some to believe that the human good is independent of the appropriateness with which use means to achieve our ends. But this worldview, like the Cartesian view, is outdated. First of all, it is dubious as a proper interpretation of the biblical passage. Second, as Peter Singer said in

response to a question from Stephen Colbert, if one believes that God allows for humans to do whatever we please to non-human animals, one should “find a better God to follow than that one”.²⁰ There is no reason to believe that creation exists purely for the benefit of humans. Instead, we now understand that the rest of creation exists causally independently of humans, aside from those things which evolved in systems alongside humans. Given that a dominion-over-animals view may have shaped the development of our moral worldview, it may unduly influence our thinking even if we now reject the view.

To repeat, my argument in the last two paragraphs does not purport to be a deductive one; it is a mere suggestion that if one does not believe that the human good is dependent upon the appropriateness of the means to achieve the good, then one should consider whether one’s moral view has its underlying basis in the intellectual residue of either a false philosophy of mind or a false view of the reason why other beings exist. If so, my suspicion is that upon thoroughly dismissing those underlying views, we will be more inclined to accept the view that whether an end is good depends upon the appropriateness of the means to achieve the end, where the appropriateness of the means is determined by the goodness of the system comprising of the user and the thing used.

I should note that in saying that humans are necessarily connected to things outside of ourselves, I do not mean to advocate a controversial anti-individualist metaphysics, such as that advocated by Alrøe and Kristensen. They too argue for a systemic environmental ethic, and they do so in part by citing the poet Alan Watts, who writes, “The world is your body.”²¹ This is a

²⁰ Colbert: “Didn’t God say in Genesis that I should subdue the other animals of the Earth and do whatever I want?” [Applause from crowd] | Singer: “Well, some people might interpret it that way, but if so, I wouldn’t follow that God... I’d find a better God to follow than that one... one who has a bit of compassion for the other beings that he created.” <http://www.comedycentral.com/videos/index.jhtml?videoId=79412>

²¹ Hugo Fjelsted Alrøe and Erik Steen Kristensen, “Toward a Systemic Ethic: In Search of an Ethical Basis for Sustainability and Precaution” *Environmental Ethics* Spring 2003 25(1): 59-78, p. 69. The Watts quote is cited in J. Baird Callicott, “The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology,” *Environmental Ethics* 8 (1985): 313. I myself happen

nice poetic line, but a literal reading of it need not be the basis of an environmental ethic. The present view simply involves the claim that we, as biological and social individuals, are necessarily connected to fellow humans and to the environment around us, and not that we literally *are* the wider system.

4. Objections

I have argued that a use is appropriate if the system comprising the user and thing used is a good system. But consider the following example: A person is falling off a cliff, but is able to grab a shrub to hold on. The shrub thus has great instrumental value and is used to promote a good. But is the system consisting of the person and the shrub a good system? It seems like it is not.²²

In response, it might be argued that to some extent, the system *is* a good system. Our hands are used for many purposes, and evolved for grasping, etc., and as such, the system in question is in accord with our natural connections to the outside world. Another response would be to say that the shrub is used to prevent something *bad* from happening rather than to say that it promotes a good. Since the argument in this paper is just that ends which are part of a good system are better than the same ends which are part of a bad system, the example is not, strictly speaking, a counterexample to the present view.

Still, there is something odd about the claim that appropriate use is reducible to whether the system involved is a good system, since it does seem like the use of the shrub is appropriate even if the system is not a good system. A second example will help clarify the point. Consider a case where an evil individual is doing great harm, both to people and to the natural world, and

to accept a non-individualist metaphysics, but believe that an ethic of concern for the natural world need not rest on such a controversial worldview.

²² Thanks to Dale Jamieson for the example.

the only way to stop the individual is to use nature in an inappropriate manner. Would such an inappropriate use undermine the goodness of the end, that of saving people and nature?²³

It is important to note that these two examples both presuppose prior circumstances in which there already are bad systems – in the first example, something must have already gone awry for the person to be falling off the cliff in the first place, and in the second, the evil individual is already causing harm. The only reason why an inappropriate use of nature is needed is because something has already gone wrong. So one might say that there are times when a bad means can be used to promote a good end – or at least prevent something bad – but this happens only when there is a bad system already in place. I shall return to this point below.

Another potential problem with my account is that the notion of a system is metaphysically vague. What exactly are the bounds of the systems of which we are parts? For example, I claim above that eating plants from one's garden is a good system. But the plants are involved in a system which includes the soil in which they grow, the sun which provides light, and air which provides needed gases. And all these, in turn, are parts of larger systems. To say that the goodness of our ends depends upon the appropriateness of our means to achieve the ends, and that the appropriateness of the means depends in turn upon the goodness of a system may lead to the consequence that ultimately the goodness of our ends depends upon the goodness of the Earth, the solar system, and the cosmos. My response to this is that it is exactly correct – it is, to borrow terminology from computer programming, a feature, and not a bug of my account. The fact that our goodness is tied up with the goodness of these systems much larger than us is not a cause for despair; it should be a cause for inspiration, especially since these larger systems will of course outlast us all.

²³ Thanks to Joshua Knobe for this type of example.

A final objection to my brief account of systems is that it does not contain enough content to make actual judgments about the relative goodness of systems. Is a person eating a Twinkie really less of a good system than a person eating freshly-grown garden vegetables? Why? My response is that while my account of systems is admittedly quite sketchy and in need of much further elaboration, it is still action-guiding to some extent. As I have claimed, interpersonal systems which involve mutual respect are better than interpersonal systems that do not. Systems which are sustainable are normally better systems than those which are not. And systems which are in accord with the evolutionary history of the species in question do tend to be better systems than those that do not. So, yes, eating freshly-grown garden vegetables is a better system than eating a Twinkie, and the consequent ends obtained in such uses may have different degrees of value even if the ends themselves (pleasure, nutrition) are intrinsically the same.

5. Conclusion and some notes for future work

This account may have broader implications for normative ethics. It may appear that if the value of an end depends upon the appropriateness of the means to achieve the end, then all forms of consequentialism are false, since on consequentialism, the appropriateness of means is simply determined by the value of the consequences, and if the value of the consequences depends on the appropriateness of the means, then there is no grounding on which to assess the action. Although the present view does reject standard forms of consequentialism under which the value of the ends must be independent of the appropriateness of the means, a new and different kind of consequentialism may still be viable. Specifically, it might still be the case that we are obligated to maximize the number of good systems. This kind of consequentialism may also be used to respond to the example in the previous section concerning the use of inappropriate means to thwart an evildoer. The reason why inappropriate means can sometimes

be used to obtain a good end is that inappropriate means can be used to obtain further good means/end *pairs*, and not just ends whose means are solely the inappropriate means in question.

In fact, an emphasis on the goodness of systems in determining the value of ends may be used to combine what is right about both deontology and consequentialism into a single normative theory. Consequentialism seems right because it is unreasonable to promote an end which is not the best overall end. Why do one action when another would leave things better? Deontology has in its favor that it respects intuitions that one should not use certain inappropriate means to achieve one's ends. But a systems approach allows for the importance of the connectedness between individuals and accepts the deontological point that if an end can only be obtained by inappropriate means, it should likely not be pursued even if it promotes what is generally a good. Thus I believe that some form of system-consequentialism can handle purported counterexamples to standard consequentialism but still maintain what is good about it. Of course, full development of this point must be reserved for another occasion.

Another consideration worth noting is that appropriateness is a matter of degree. There are cases where a means is mildly inappropriate, and in those cases, the end may be less good than if accomplished through fully appropriate means, but that is not to say that it would completely cease to be a good. As I say above, all ends/mean pairs are connected to larger systems, and thus all use of means involves some connection to good systems and some level of connection to inappropriate ones (especially given the current state of the world). My claim in this paper is just that degree of goodness of ends *varies* with degree of appropriateness of means. The precise relation between goodness of ends and appropriateness of means on a systemicist approach will have to be a topic for future work.

Lastly, I should note an implication of the specific systemicist view in this paper. If goodness of an end is subsidiary to the goodness of the system, then why should we give priority in our normal conceptions of value to the goodness our particular ends rather than to the goodness of the systems in which we are involved? Although it is not wrong to view human ends as intrinsic goods, we should consider both humans ends and the means we use to achieve these ends to be what C. I. Lewis calls *contributory goods*.²⁴ A contributory good is a kind of extrinsic good – it is the good that a *part* has due to its contribution to the goodness of a larger whole. If a human end is in fact a good end, it is such only insofar as the means used to achieve the end are appropriate. But as I argue, the means used are appropriate only if the system comprised of the user and the used is a good system. As such, ascriptions of instrumental value to means and intrinsic value to ends are in a sense beside the point. Instead, a primary focus of our thinking about goodness and value should be on the systems of which we are mere parts and whose goodness is the precondition for the goodness of our own ends.

²⁴ C. I. Lewis, *The Ground and Nature of the Right*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955, p. 68. See also Ben Bradley, “Extrinsic Value”, *Philosophical Studies* 91 (1998): 109–126, p. 120, and Gilbert Harman, “Intrinsic Value”, in *Explaining Value and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 144-148.